DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 472 CS 014 182

AUTHOR Griffith, Priscilla L., Ed.; Lynch-Brown, Carol, Ed.
TITLE Voices of the Other: Understandings Emerging from the Controversy.
INSTITUTION International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 51p.; Reprinted from the May 2000 Themed Issue of "The Reading Teacher," Volume 53, Number 8 (ISSN-0034-0561).
AVAILABLE FROM International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139 ($9.95). Web site: http://www.reading.org.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Democratic Values; *Educational Policy; Elementary Education; *Government School Relationship; *Literacy; Parent Participation; *Politics of Education; *Reading Research; *Teacher Role; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS International Reading Association; Kentucky

ABSTRACT

This booklet features articles that explore the roles and relationships in partnerships for enhancing reading and writing in the elementary years. The authors communicate how voices outside the reading profession--parents, community members, and state and federal policymakers--are affecting literacy instruction, and how educators must establish a dialogue with these diverse voices. The booklet's 7 articles are as follows: (1) "Editorial: Voices of the Other: Understandings Emerging from the Controversy" (Priscilla L. Griffith); (2) "The De-democratization of Schools and Literacy in America" (James V. Hoffman); (3) "The International Reading Association Responds to a Highly Charged Policy Environment" (Cathy Roller); (4) "The Voices of Researchers: Conflict and Consensus in Reading Research and Policy" (Claude Goldenberg); (5) "Educators Influencing Legislators: Commentary and the Kentucky Case" (Shirley C. Raines); (6) "Making Kids Winners: New Perspectives about Literacy from Urban Elementary School Principals" (Jennifer C. Dandridge, Patricia A. Edwards, and Heather M. Pleasants); and (7) "Stopping the Silence: Hearing Parents' Voices in an Urban First-Grade Family Literacy Program" (Robert J. Nistler and Angela Maiers). (SR)

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Priscilla L. Griffith
Carol Lynch-Brown
Editors

Voices of the Other

Understandings Emerging From the Controversy

J.M. Irwin

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CS 014 162

Reprinted From the May 2000 Themed Issue of
The Reading Teacher
VOLUME 53 NO 8 ISSN 0034-0561

Reprinted From the
May 2000
Themed Issue of
The Reading Teacher
VOLUME 53, N°8, ISSN 0034-0561

Voices of the Other

Understandings Emerging From the Controversy

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Priscilla L. Griffith, Editor

Voices of the other: Understandings emerging from the controversy

The stakeholders in worldwide literacy are all of us: school districts, parent groups, businesses, community agencies, and governments. In this themed issue, we will explore the roles and relationships in partnerships for enhancing reading and writing in the elementary years. Parents, the community, and state and federal policy makers are becoming increasingly empowered to express their feelings about issues in schooling such as methodology, assessment, and instructional materials. Here we publish articles that will help the journal audience make sense of this societal trend and be proactive with it. Voices of the other originate out of literacy failures, from disenfranchised populations, and in different community worldviews. Our children and our profession will be the losers if we do not establish a dialogue among these diverse voices.

One of the most interesting parts of the process of putting together this themed issue was to realize the different ways in which our authors interpreted the theme. Stakeholders, dialogue, and partnerships are threads that run through this collection of articles. We asked for ways in which the journal audience could understand and communicate with the voices outside our profession that are affecting literacy instruction.

In "The De-democratization of Schools and Literacy in America," James V. Hoffman discusses the dissonance between the goals of education to promote a democratic society and the policy mandates being used to define what literacy instruction should be. Hoffman reminds us that we are stakeholders too. He calls upon us to make sense of the situation by teaching in a way that nurtures reading, by resisting any compromise to our professional knowledge, by inquiring into questions important to us, and by connecting as a professional group.

Cathy Roller's article focuses on the proactive role the International Reading Association has taken in response to the current political environment. She reminds us that central to the Association's mission is the idea that it is teachers who ought to be making the decisions about how children should be taught to read. Roller puts us in touch with the thinking of many of the stakeholders in literacy. Her chronicle of the Association's involvement with the Reading Excellence Act and a description of pending projects helps us understand the Association's advocacy role.

In their commentaries, Shirley Raines and Claude Goldenberg speak to the issue of establishing dialogue among diverse voices. Raines describes a project in Kentucky in which this dialogue did occur. In the Kentucky case, as in most situations where educators and legislators talk, we see the impact of two worldviews colliding. Raines emphasizes the importance of getting past this impact and maintaining the dialogue, the need to cut through the legislative and educational jargon, and the reality that the whole process took much time and patience. Goldenberg's message is that we have gone beyond healthy disagreement within our profession to an antagonism that has created the impression of chaos within. He urges us to build

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our dialogue around what we agree upon so that we can make our voices matter.

We called for articles that explored the roles and relationships in partnerships for enhancing reading and writing in the elementary years. In "Making Kids Winners: New Perspectives About Literacy From Urban Elementary School Principals" Jennifer Danridge, Patricia Edwards, and Heather Pleasants illuminate the role of the urban principal in connecting home and school. Robert Nistler and Angela Maiers's article, "Stopping the Silence: Hearing Parent Voices in an Urban First-Grade Family Literacy Program," is a description of how one teacher has been able to form a partnership with the parents of children in her classroom.

We bring you back to the threads in this theme: stakeholders, dialogue, and partnerships. Perhaps over the summer months this issue will stimulate discussion about these threads—discussion with yourself and discussion among colleagues. This is the first of the yearly themed issues Carol Lynch-Brown and I will be preparing during our term as editors. We hope you enjoy them all.

James V. Hoffman

The de-democratization of schools and literacy in America

The author asserts that recent attempts to reform schools in the U.S. have been undemocratic and represent a threat to teachers and students.

> Certainly there will be no liberty, no equality, no social justice without democracy, and there will be no democracy without citizens and the schools that forge civic identity and democratic responsibility. (Barber, 1993, p. 46)

Schools are institutions that serve multiple functions but a singular goal: to prepare the young to assume a contributing place in society. Schools are not neutral in their stance toward the nature of that society. Indeed, schools are remarkably self-serving. They enculturate the young toward the values, beliefs, skills, and understandings that will preserve existing structures. But schools can also, under the best of circumstances, challenge us to examine our own society, reflect on its strengths and weaknesses, and set our sights on improvements. This is what a democracy demands if it is to thrive, not just survive.

Educated citizens are a requirement for a democracy to flourish—perhaps more so than in any other form of government (Kane, 1984). The delicate balance between individual freedoms and collective responsibilities are grounded in a collective social capital that is loosely defined around a set of abstract democratic principles. How schools induct the young into this world is a remarkable challenge, but one that we in the United States have lived up to for generations. Educators, and classroom teachers in particular, have a fundamental role to play in the preservation of our democratic way of life. Schools in the U.S. have served our society well because they have embraced democratic values—flawed in execution certainly, but at least valuing democratic ideals. This position regarding democracy and educational goals can be traced throughout the history of educational philosophy in the U.S.

Although publicly embraced, the fusion of democracy and schooling is not easily achieved. John Dewey (1916), the most passionate and articulate spokesperson for education in democracy, argued for the deep complexity of democracy in education:

> The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting on popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their government are educated. . . . But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. (p. 87)

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press have been cornerstones in the evolution, articulation, and protection of democracy in the U.S. A critical reading of the texts that surround us is essential to the foundations of a democratic life (Heath, 1991). Critical and democratic readings of texts might even be considered synonymous. As reading and literacy educators we bear an enormous responsibility for educating citizens. I will argue here that U.S. schools are in danger of failing in their goal to promote democratic values and democratic modes of thinking. I will argue that critical reading of texts has taken a backseat to "teaching the basics" in the reform movement of the past decade. Finally, I will argue that texts themselves have become a primary

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control mechanism in the de-democratization of schools, teaching, and learning.

Crisis and reform

> The primary purpose of education in a democratic society is democracy. This essential truth has been lost in much of the contemporary educational debates. (Fraser, 1997)

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stands out as a watershed point in the evolution of education in the U.S. The authors of this report lamented that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 5). They went on to warn that "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." In many ways, this kind of crisis/reform rhetoric was similar to that used 25 years earlier to link the nation's shortcomings in the space race and the Cold War with the failure of the public school system. The rhetoric was where the similarities ended. The public and political responses to the attacks were not at all the same.

The post-Sputnik era response took the form of an enormous investment of resources in education by the federal government. This was an investment unparalleled in U.S. history. Among the targeted points for investment were curriculum development initiatives (e.g., Science Curriculum Improvement Study projects in science 1970; "Man, a Course of Study" in social studies, Corr 1971); research initiatives (e.g., the cooperative first-grade studies project in reading, Bond & Dykstra, 1967); and investments in teacher education (e.g., National Defense Education Act seminars and institutes). Leadership for the reform movement came from within the profession. President Lyndon Johnson built on these initiatives to promote educational opportunity for a diverse society through sponsorship of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the early 1960s. This act provided the first significant, direct investment in public education on the part of the federal government. Substantial funding for compensatory education programs, for library materials, and for the modernization of school facilities was funneled through this program.

In contrast, the response to the *Nation at Risk* crisis of the 1980s was set in terms of "fiscal conservatism" (read: "Throwing more money at education is not going to solve the problem!"). Although the report offers very specific recommendations for reform, the recommendations can be summarized in terms of three basic themes: raise standards, measure results, and hold people accountable for their performance. The voice of educators as a nurturing and caring profession is absent from this document. Economic discourse and business metaphors abound. Underlying all of the arguments is the belief that for the reform to succeed, policy makers must wrestle control of education from educators.

They have. Centralization and control are the reality in education as we enter the 21st century. Two hundred years of democratic and grass-roots traditions in educational decision making have been abandoned in just a decade. Is there a threat to American society from its schools? Yes, there is. The real threat comes from the de-democratization of our educational system. As a literacy educator, I see this threat represented in the proliferation of reductionist curricula for reading, in the silencing of professional dialogue and debate, in the marginalizing of minority positions and people, in a muting of the voices in the texts our students are expected to read, and in a stern control over the "correct" interpretations of these already bland texts.

The authors of *A Nation at Risk* admonished us to consider that "Children born today can expect to graduate from high school in the year 2000" (p. 36). Here we are in the year 2000, and what do we know about these students? We know they are bored. Studies of secondary teachers reveal that the number one problem they encounter in schools is not violence or disruption—it is the tremendous sense of apathy toward learning (e.g., Sizer, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1991). A second reality for students and teachers is high-stakes testing. For those students who can pass them, these tests offer one more experience with a lackluster curriculum. For those students who cannot pass them, they are one more instance of schools telling them that they don't have what it takes to make it. A wildly disproportionate number of minority students complete high school require-

ments but, because they fail the high-stakes test, never graduate. A third reality is tracking. There are gates to accessing certain parts of the curriculum. Students learn early in their schooling careers which paths are open to them and which are not. The bottom line is that success breeds success and failure breeds failure. Opportunity and choice are not distributed equitably for students in schools (see Oakes, 1985).

What kind of society are we preparing these students for? What kind of society will they be capable of sustaining? These are the issues that should trouble our profession and provoke our conversations. It's our turn to sound the alarm to a society that genuinely believes educational reforms are in our students' and nation's best interests.

The "business" metaphor

John Goodlad (1996) noted that the 1986 slogan of the National Governors' Association, "better schools mean better jobs"—repeated over and over again in the 1990s—sells better politically than "education for democracy" (p. 94). We have swallowed the "business" metaphor for schools totally. Social norms are passé. Indeed, any references to a consideration of social factors in schooling (e.g., social promotion) are regarded with skepticism. We are comfortable in the language of productivity, inputs, outputs, standards, and quality control. After all, these are all measurable outcomes where resource management and efficiency are what count. Can democratic outcomes even be measured, let alone taught? Perhaps we have lost sight of what democracy means in our society, and therefore find it difficult to regard it as a priority in our schools. The supply function is easier to deal with and manage. Schools must serve the interests of the society first. If the interests of individual students or entire segments of our society are not met, so be it.

Paulo Freire (1989) reminded us of the undemocratic nature of much current educational practice. He warned of the danger of a curriculum in which, "Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, embrace and repeat" (p. 58). Besides being ineffective most of the time—with the students not being very interested in the teacher's communiqués—this sort of education teaches the opposite set of values from those needed in a democratic society. In a truly liberating education "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing helpful inquiry people pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 58).

In search of democracy

Most of us can recite the critical features of the institution of U.S. democracy. We can talk about the system of checks and balances, we can describe the division of state and federal responsibilities, and we might even be able to describe some specific abuses of a democracy such as how redistricting was used to promote racism. But our true knowledge of democracy is limited, in some sense, by our lack of perspective. Most of us live in a democracy like fish who live only in water and are therefore blinded to many of its qualities. Often, it takes the outsider to reveal important qualities lived but not noticed. Democracy is not revealed so much in the textbooks as it is in daily living. It took a foreigner to reveal as much to the world—and to Americans.

Alexis de Tocqueville, and his associate Gustave Beaumont, traveled extensively in the United States from May 1831 through February 1832. De Tocqueville's homeland, France, was torn at the time between democratic impulses and the traditions of aristocracy. De Tocqueville was determined to study democracy in America to gain insight into its potential for his own country. He petitioned for an 18-month leave of absence from the Ministry of Justice to study the prison system in America. Prison reform was a heated topic of debate in France at this time, and the Americans had some interesting ideas that appeared worthy of study. The mission was eventually approved by the ministry although the funding for the trip ended up being entirely personal.

De Tocqueville and Beaumont visited all of the major prisons in the U.S. and conducted extensive interviews with both administrators and prisoners. They wrote a comprehensive report that was enormously influential on prison reform in France. Having completed this task, they moved on to their more important effort—the study of democracy in America. They read, traveled, observed, and interviewed people everywhere they went. After returning to France, de Tocqueville and Beaumont divided their writing tasks, with Beaumont focusing on the conditions of Indians

and Negroes in America. De Tocqueville wrote more generally regarding democracy and daily life. *The Democracy*, written and published in two parts, explored the nature of democracy in America ranging from political structures to social relations (Pierson, 1938).

The immense popularity of the book among both academics and the general public is indicative of its significance. De Tocqueville not only is recognized for his remarkable insights into the nature of American democracy, but also commonly regarded as one of the pioneers in sociological research. Democracy is revealed through the careful inspection of an outsider. De Tocqueville captured in his narrative what was for those "inside" American life hidden in experience. The power of de Tocqueville's writing comes not so much in the points he made as in the narrative he wrapped around them. He has written the story of a lived democracy from the perspective of one who has known only the life of aristocracy in Europe.

There are at least four broad insights from de Tocqueville's writings that I feel can enlighten our understanding of education, literacy, and democracy. First, power and authority reside within the individual citizen in a democracy. No act of the state can take away from individuals their opportunity to act in their interests. Laws of the state protect the individual. They are not designed to control the individual. Second, democracy is highly active but not very efficient in the short term. It may even look like it's not working when it really is. De Tocqueville described town meetings he observed in New England and commented on the slow deliberative processes involved. Despite its short-term uncertainty, in the long run democracy is enormously productive. The best ideas eventually will flourish and take hold. Third, de Tocqueville recognized the critical role that freedom of speech and freedom of the press play as a context for change in a democratic society. Open and protected dialogue is the key. Fourth, leadership in a democracy is not the same as leadership in a more authoritarian or totalitarian system. The strong leader is not the person who forces others down a path he or she has chosen. The strong leader in a democracy is one who recognizes opportunity and is appropriately responsive to the moment.

What would a school system designed to mirror such a society look like? What would a school system designed to prepare the young to become caretakers and contributors to such a society look like? At a minimum, we would expect substantial degrees of autonomy in decision making and respect for individual rights (of both students and teachers). We would expect open dialogue that would be open to all voices and perspectives. We might expect the appearance of chaos or disorganization at times, recognizing that order and direction must emerge and cannot be imposed. Not all schools, curricula, or instruction would be exactly the same. Finally, we would expect leaders who are skilled at nurturing dialogue, at creating synthesis, and at using the school context as a catalyst for change.

What would de Tocqueville see today if he focused on everyday life in the U.S. and life in schools? Are the features of respect for individual rights, dialogue, short-term inefficacy complemented by long-term productivity, and responsive leadership features he would notice? I don't think so. Ironically, his observations might lead de Tocqueville to assume the topic for discussion was prison reform, not school reform.

Does it take an outsider to reveal ourselves to us? Not always. Sometimes the insider can move out and look back. Over the past several years, the International Reading Association has become involved in a professional development effort in Eastern Europe with former Soviet bloc countries. The project, entitled Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking, has involved a collaboration with the Soros Foundation. The Soros Foundation is dedicated to assisting societies in the transformation from authoritarian to democratic ways of living. Education is only one point of intervention, but it is the point of collaboration with the Association. Over 60 volunteers, the majority being faculty from institutions in higher education in the United States, have been working with educators in eastern Europe to transform schools into institutions that prepare young people for living in a democratic society. Teacher education and professional development are key points of entry. Strategies for helping teachers in schools help students engage critically with the texts they read have been the focal point. This is a revolutionary concept in most of the schools where the norm has been on controlled texts and controlled interpretations.

The transformation of schools and the transformation into a democratic society must go

hand in hand. There is another message as well. The volunteers who return to the U.S. after their work in these countries almost unanimously report that this has been a transformative experience for them in understanding how democracy must be represented and reflected in all aspects of our schooling—from the critical reading of texts to the nature of leadership in schools.

Policy mandates and the erosion of democracy

> We hear a great deal about readying the next generation of workers for global competition, about being first in the world in such high status subjects as math and science, and about having world class standards for what is learned in school. We hear almost nothing about civic participation or building and maintaining democratic communities, whether these be neighborhoods or governments at the local, state or federal level. Not only does the current national reform movement in the United States pay too little attention to the ideas and ideals of democracy, it pays far too little attention to the ideas and ideals of education. (Feinberman, 1994, p. 4)

Recent attempts to reform schools in the U.S. have been decidedly undemocratic in nature and spirit. The reform movement is being led by politicians who are using their positions of authority and power to control the actions of educators. Policy mandates that directly or indirectly control the actions of educators have proliferated over the past decade. Consider the following:

- Practically every state now has in place some form of mandated standardized testing plan. While these assessments are rationalized in terms of accountability, they are in fact being used to control the curriculum. Stakes are being raised for students (e.g., promotion, graduation), for teachers (e.g., merit pay), and for administrators (e.g., pay bonuses, transfers).
- State curriculum frameworks for reading and language arts proliferate and are being mandated. These are not statements of general educational aims or goals, these are detailed scripts and specifications for what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught.
- State mandates for helping struggling readers are leading to a wave of labeling, sorting, and prescriptions for treatment of these students.
- The content of commercial materials is being shaped by state mandates and requirements. The marketplace is no longer free to respond to the market forces that have worked in the past. Several states dominate, but the effects are felt nationally.
- Specific methods of instruction are being mandated by state legislation. Over 40 states are considering legislation that would require a phonics-first curriculum for beginning reading.
- The content of teacher preparation programs is being mandated to include preparation and training in specific techniques and over specific content.
- What counts as research has now been defined through federal legislative initiatives. Much of the money targeted for initiatives in education must be used with programs that have been "proven" effective by this research.
- Teacher tests that focus on particular perspectives and particular kinds of knowledge are being developed and used to control entry and advancement within the teaching profession. Much like the mandated testing programs for students, these programs are having a direct impact on the curriculum for teacher education.

All of these initiatives are in the control of politicians. Ironically, democracy is often used as the banner for such reforms. "Broad public and professional participation" (in forums and conferences) does not take away from the fact that each of these is fundamentally undemocratic in character. Reform efforts that rely on mandates developed over time and with "input" may create the illusion of democracy, but they are not democratic.

The real effects of these mandates will be the following:

- Less learning and less high-quality teaching. If we have learned anything from the body of research into effective teaching it is that the best teachers are adaptive and responsive to the needs of the students they teach. They don't rely on one method. They are pedagogically responsive. By mandating methods and curriculum we take away the power to respond.

- A trivialized curriculum. Mandates do not operate in the abstract. They require specificity at a behavioral level that can be observed and documented. Higher level thinking and more abstract learning goals will be shunned.
- Less attention to those in greatest need. We will continue to focus our resources on sorting rather than serving special-needs students.
- Teaching will become a technical activity. The best teachers value autonomy, spontaneity, and the immediacy of the classroom. As these norms are violated, the best teachers will leave and the field will become less attractive to professionals.
- Research as inquiry will be lost. Research in literacy has exploded over the past 2 decades. We have learned that research and practice are close partners in the development of scientific knowledge. If the current conditions prevail, research will be relegated to a position of informing mandates that control practice.
- Students will drop out from school—both literally and figuratively. The dropouts will be seen in the increasing numbers of minorities who simply give up and stop attending, but there will be more. The wave of student apathy toward schools will continue to grow.
- Democracy in schools will die. There will be no space for it to survive.

These will be the real effects of the mindless reform frenzy we are experiencing. The short-term effects may create the illusion of progress: Scores on state-mandated tests will rise because teachers will teach to the test; the numbers seeking to enter teaching as a job will increase as it becomes a more technical profession and a more 8:00–4:00, 5-days-per-week, 9-months-a-year responsibility; and claims for "research verified" practices will become commonplace as the profit principle plays out. But these are illusions of positive impact, not the real points of impact. The negative effects may be masked for the present, but will appear in the long run. De Tocqueville (1945) was right when he observed that

> The partisans of centralization... are wont to maintain that the government can administer the affairs of each locality better than the citizens could do it for themselves; this may be true when the central power is enlightened and the local authorities are ignorant, when it is alert and they are slow, when it is accustomed to act and they to obey. Indeed, it is evident that this double tendency must augment with the increase of centralization, and that the readiness of the one and the incapacity of the others must become more and more prominent. But I deny that it is so when the people are as enlightened, as awake to their interests, and as accustomed to reflect on them as the Americans are. I am persuaded, on the contrary, that in this case the collective strength of the citizens will always conduce more efficaciously to the public welfare than the authority of government... whenever a central administration affects completely to supersede the persons most interested, I believe that it is either misled or desirous to mislead.... These are not the conditions on which the alliance of the human will is to be obtained; it must be free in its gait and responsible for its acts, or (such is the constitution of man) the citizen had rather remain a passive spectator than a dependent actor in schemes with which he is unacquainted.... It is not the administrative, but the political effects of the decentralization that I admire most in America. (pp. 89–91)

Gloom and doom

I have painted a fairly pessimistic, almost Orwellian, picture of the present and an even darker picture for the future. Sadly, this is what I see when I step back and look at the big picture. But there is another side of my professional life that gives me considerable hope for the future. Every time I go to the classroom in the public school where I teach my undergraduate methods courses, every time I visit the classrooms of teachers who work closely with our program, and every time I work with classroom teachers in inservice settings or graduate classes I am struck with their remarkable enthusiasm and resiliency. Most teachers, despite the conditions I have just described, find a way to teach well. This gives me hope, and it frames the principal message in this essay. The fight for democracy in schools will be won or lost in the classrooms across the U.S. at the most basic grass-roots level, not in the halls of state legislatures. This is not to say that we should not engage at the political level, but our first responsibility is to take care of business at home and not allow, by erosion or coercion, our teaching to be compromised.

And why is this a reading problem and not a science problem, or a mathematics problem? Clearly, the situation is threatening to all who value and have an investment in education, but

the situation is particularly crucial to those of us in reading education. Texts in a democracy and the reading of these texts are the lifeblood of a democracy.

> The more I consider the independence of the press in its principal consequences, the more I am convinced that in the modern world it is the chief and, so to speak, the constitutive element of liberty. A nation that is determined to remain free is therefore right in demanding, at any price, the exercise of this independence. (de Tocqueville, 1945, p. 200)

Texts in schools are being controlled and being used to control (Apple, 1993). We are quickly approaching a state, as Dominique Macedo (1994) referred to it, of literacy for "stupidification" (p. 9). It is imperative that those of us who claim reading as our profession act and adopt, as Maxine Greene (1978) suggested, a stance of "wide-awakeness."

> [F]or too many individuals in modern society, there is a feeling of being dominated and that feelings of powerlessness are almost inescapable. . . . I am also suggesting that such feelings can to a large degree be overcome through conscious endeavor on the part of individuals to keep themselves awake, to think about their condition in the world, to inquire into forces that appear to dominate them, to interpret the experiences they are having day by day. (pp. 43–44)

And so I have devised a fairly simple set of principles for literacy educators. There is no revolution here, just good practice and professional responsibility.

- *Teach.* Immerse your students in texts that make them cry, laugh, scream, puzzle, blabber, or frown. Demand a critical reading of these texts. Teach skills and strategies in a context that nurtures a value for reading.
- *Resist.* Do not do anything you are asked or told to do that will compromise your responsibility to teach your students in a way your professional knowledge dictates. This is a moral imperative. It cannot be set aside for any reason. This does not always translate to an "in your face" kind of stance. Ayers (1993) reminded us of the many ways in which teachers can be creatively noncompliant.
- *Inquire.* Don't say you know it all—you don't. Don't say you don't know anything—you do. Reveal what you know through the questions that are important to you. Read widely and deeply.
- *Connect.* You must not be silenced as an individual or as a professional. A professional voice must be present in the debates over the future of schooling. Your professional organizations must be politically active and effective for you at the local, state, and national levels.

And what about the politicians? What role do they have in education and a democracy? My answer is that they should play a role in education similar to that they play in business and the economy. They must ensure that the market forces are working well and that no groups (e.g., professional organizations, businesses, government bureaucracies) are allowed to take advantage of the system. Further, if they want to assume an active role in promoting quality schools, they should make every effort to increase the supply of quality teachers in the profession (e.g., by supporting teacher education, by enhancing the conditions of teaching as a profession). Following this path, we would soon find ourselves as allies and not adversaries with a common goal.

If we as a teaching profession can persevere in this cause, the public will join with us—because, after all, we aspire to the same goals. Deborah Meier (1982) captured this sentiment well:

> If America can commit itself to this next task—educating all children well—the historic promise of free public schooling will be fulfilled. It doesn't require a nationalized curriculum backed by a high-stakes testing program that falsely promises order and control, for a privatized market-driven system offering the illusion of freedom and individuality. What it requires is tough but doable: generous resources, thoughtful and steady work, respect for the diverse perspectives of people who work in and attend our schools and, finally, sustained public interest in and tolerance for the process of re-invention. Nothing else will do it. (p. 272)

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Cathy Roller

The International Reading Association responds to a highly charged policy environment

The Association has an important role to play as the voice of teachers and as a source of credible literacy research.

In August 1998, I became the Director of Research and Policy for the International Reading Association. I wanted the position because of the volatile and explosive U.S. government policy environment confronting reading professionals. I knew that the Association, the largest literacy organization in the world, had the opportunity to influence policy directions in ways that would help all children learn to read. I also knew, because of the position announcement, that the Association's Board of Directors was ready to move in order to accomplish its goals.

I have been a member of the Association for more than 30 years, and never in that 30 years have I seen such intensity, determination, and conflict whirling through the various professional venues of reading instruction. In the period just before and since I arrived, the Association has been responding to this challenging policy environment. In this article I will touch on several of those responses. The Association has done the following:

- refocused the Research Division,
- increased its willingness to take stands on important issues,
- increased its involvement in the Title I reauthorization effort,
- monitored the National Reading Panel, and
- responded to the Reading Excellence Act.

The current policy environment in the U.S.

These efforts have been necessary because teachers' and local school districts' rights to determine instructional methods used for reading instruction have been challenged. That teachers should have authority to make the decisions about how children are taught to read is central to the Association's mission. For many years that authority went relatively unchallenged. In recent years, however, legislators in the United States, at both the state and national levels, have made or attempted to make decisions about reading instructional methods. Many private nonprofit groups have spent time and money encouraging legislators to mandate particular teaching approaches. In Delaware, home of the International Reading Association, the State House of Representatives Majority Leader Wayne A. Smith proposed a bill, H.B. 261, that calls for phonics as the primary form of reading instruction in Grades K–4. Smith believes his proposed legislation will improve Delaware children's reading achievement. When asked what led him to propose the legislation, he said that similar legislation had been enacted in California and that California's test scores had improved. However, California's scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in fourth-grade reading did not improve in 1998 (Donahue, Voelld, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1998). Even if they had, there proba-

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bly has not been enough time for the legislative changes to have had any effects on reading scores. Similar legislation has been introduced and in many cases passed in legislatures across the U.S.—often on the basis of such incorrect understandings.

Why are interest groups and legislators usurping reading professionals' prerogatives? This is a complex question with a complex set of possible answers. A single definitive explanation is unlikely. As the call for proposals for this issue of *The Reading Teacher* suggested, literacy failures, disenfranchised populations, and different community views have contributed to the cacophony of voices surrounding early reading instruction. Reading is very important, and parents, legislators, interest groups, and other stakeholders have a right to be heard. Their opinions should be strongly considered and attended to when teachers and local education authorities make decisions about children's reading instruction. However, it is inappropriate to dictate methodologies for teaching reading at the state and national level. Those entities are too large and too far away to consider all the relevant input that must contribute to classroom reading instructional decisions.

Literacy failures

The media, the general public, and indeed many educators believe educators are failing to teach children to read. The perception of failure persists in the face of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data showing that reading achievement at the Grade 4 level has remained relatively stable since the 1970s (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997), and that in 1998 reading achievement scores increased modestly and these gains were statistically significant (Donahue et al., 1998).

The perception of failure comes from several sources. Increased literacy demands in the modern economy are perhaps the most important source. Prior to the 1970s, there were still large numbers of jobs in the manufacturing sector that required minimal literacy skills and provided adequate income. With the economy's shift away from manufacturing and toward the service and information sectors, the number of such jobs has drastically declined. There simply are much greater demands for literacy. Literacy levels perceived as sufficient in the past are now insufficient.

Inequitable distribution of reading achievement across different income levels is another source of the failure perception. Poverty is one of the best predictors of reading achievement. For the U.S. as a whole, 38% of fourth-grade children scored below the basic level on NAEP; however, for children falling below the poverty line the percentage was 58%. In some urban schools, the proportion of children falling below the basic level was as high as 68% (Donahue et al., 1998). There is no way to claim that all children have access to equal opportunities to learn to read.

Wide variability in both the learning rates and the ultimate success of children learning to read also contributes to perceptions of failure. Wide variation among children in weight, height, and athletic ability is not surprising. Some children become great athletes, most engage at some point in their lives in some form of recreational sport, and others choose not to engage in sports at all. Variation in the ways that healthy children learn to read is similar. A few children learn to read before they come to school, most learn to read by second or third grade, and a few do not learn after 4 or 5 years of instruction and intensive individual tutoring. As children move through school the disparities among them increase. One study (Allington, 1983) found that the best first-grade readers read almost 2,000 words per week. Struggling first-grade children read only 16 words per week. By the intermediate grades struggling readers have read approximately 100,000 words. The average reader has read 1,000,000, and the most avid readers have read as many as 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 (Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

As a professional who worked for many years with children who struggle to learn, I am painfully aware of these differences in learning to read. There are a very few children (probably less than 1–3% of healthy children) who are extremely difficult to teach, no matter the kind and intensity of instruction provided. However, reading is more important than sports and athletic performance. It permeates all academic learning, and poor reading frequently means poor learning. Despite individual differences, parents and the public expect all children to learn to read. If we fall short of that goal, we have failed.

Statistics about the levels of adult illiteracy, the reading achievement levels of incarcerated populations, and the numbers of job applicants who cannot pass literacy tests related to the jobs they apply for also contribute to the perception of failure. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), we have been inundated with reports and reform efforts aimed at improving reading and writing skills. While reliable data suggest that reading achievement has been stable since 1970, and that 1998 NAEP scores indicated modest improvement, no one, including most educators and reading professionals, is satisfied with those levels of achievement.

Disenfranchised populations

As noted, reading achievement is inequitably distributed across income levels in the United States. As a group, poor children do not read as well as middle class and rich children. Reading achievement also is distributed inequitably across racial and ethnic groups. African American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American children as groups do not read as well as their white (European American) peers. While only 29% of white fourth-grade children scored below the basic level in 1998, the percentages were 67%, 56%, 41%, and 47% for African American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American children, respectively. Cultural values, race, ethnicity, language, and poverty are all related to reading achievement levels.

Professionals and parents from these communities are rightfully concerned that the public schools are not serving their children well, and that the schools may be in fact contributing to rather than ameliorating achievement differences in reading. Children in high-poverty schools (which have disproportionately large numbers of minority children) have fewer physical resources and qualified teachers. In the schools with the highest poverty levels, in-class reading and language instruction is more likely to be provided by a teacher's aide than a certified teacher (44% in these schools compared with 17% in other schools) (Millsap, Moss, & Gamse, 1993). Less qualified personnel teach the children at highest risk for reading failure, when in fact they deserve the best teachers. In addition many persons teaching children to read are not credentialed teachers. They are working with emergency credentials and waivers, and have no formal training to teach students to read. Parents, teachers, advocates, and legislators want this problem solved.

Different community views

The United States does not have a homogeneous population. Its residents come in all colors, races, and religions, and have different philosophies and value systems. In any time period, various groups—environmentalists, business advocates, conservatives, liberals, the religious right, the radical left—vie for power and influence. In the recent past these groups have been more polarized. Conservative groups, religious groups, and some low-income groups—all of whom are dissatisfied with U.S. public schools—support charter schools and voucher systems, while traditional liberals, the radical left, and other groups of low-income people view charter schools and vouchers as attempts to destroy the public schools and deny disenfranchised people access to free public education. There are increasing numbers of private and religious schools and more parents are choosing to home school their children. Many U.S. parents doubt the capacity of public schools to educate their children in an appropriate moral climate. School violence and lack of discipline in some schools have contributed to these impressions. A number of special interest groups have become more vocal and waged campaigns to change the public education system. They want schools directly controlled by parents via charter schools and voucher systems, and they demand that teachers in public schools use instructional methods consistent with their views. Democracy offers the opportunity to enact these viewpoints. If we are dissatisfied with the laws being enacted, we must take action. When everyone acts it is sometimes confusing and chaotic, and we experience the voices of many actors as cacophony. Democracy in action is often discordant.

Changes at the International Reading Association

In response to this demanding political environment, the Association has changed. The title change for the Division of Research, which is now the Division of Research and Policy, is one important indicator. The change reflects the Board of Directors' concerns that legislative

On policy mandates

Background

We, the International Reading Association, believe that student learning is most likely to be maximized under conditions of local control; and that an open intellectual marketplace for ideas and a competitive economic marketplace for materials must be valued and protected as the basis for the improvement of reading instruction. Policy makers at the state and national levels play an important role in the conduct and improvement of reading instruction, and have the potential to make a positive impact on reading education, research, and teacher education.

We are concerned, therefore, with the trend for policy makers to mandate specific instruction practices, programs or materials, classroom reading assessments, and narrowly restrictive content knowledge requirements for pre- and inservice preparation of reading teachers. If we are to be successful in improving reading achievement we must locate decision making at the point of service to students. Broad mandates can intrude on or even replace professional decision making, resulting in instruction that is less responsive to student needs. Ultimately, the effects of such mandates are to reduce the quality of instruction in schools and classrooms and to limit the potential for all students to be successful in learning to read.

Resolution

Be it resolved, therefore, that the International Reading Association urges policy makers to promote policies that allow publishers and developers to create materials and programs that are responsive to the needs of all students.

adopted by the Delegates Assembly, May 1998

mandates seem to be based on no research or an unrepresentative summary of research or, worse, run counter to research findings. As a profession, reading does have a research base that can inform many instructional decisions. However, as Allington (in press) points out, it is public opinion rather than research that influences policy makers. The recognition of this influence has led the Board to focus on the importance of having the knowledge and expertise of the Association placed squarely in the public arena. The change in the title of the division is concrete evidence of the Board's emphasis on influencing policy that affects reading instruction and reading professionals.

A second important change indicator is the willingness of the Board to take stands in position statements. Prior to 1995, there were very few position statements. Since 1997, the Board of Directors has developed and adopted six such statements: The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction (1997); Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading (1998); Learning to Read and Write (A joint statement with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998); Using Multiple Methods of Beginning Reading Instruction (1999); Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement (1999); and High-Stakes Assessments in Reading (1999). These position statements are available online at www.reading.org. The Association is developing several other statements on teacher effectiveness, reading instruction for speakers of English as a second language, provision of adequate resources for reading, and social promotion.

In a very short time, the Association has gone from regarding beginning reading instruction as the prerogative of reading professionals to realizing that if that prerogative is to be maintained, the Association as the representative of over 90,000 individual and institutional members needs to take strong stands. This was very explicitly stated in the 1998 resolution on policy mandates (see sidebar); four of the recent position statements are directly related to beginning reading instruction.

A third indication of changes at the Association is the use of Board-approved principles to guide the reauthorization of Title I of the U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act. While the Association has been involved with Title I since its inception, and its Washington office has monitored and influenced previous reauthorizations, this is the first time Association committees (Title I and Governmental Relations) have worked with the Board and the Washington representative to produce principles to guide reauthorization efforts. Those principles with explanations and supporting citations are available from pubinfo@reading.org.

A fourth manifestation of the change is our careful monitoring of the National Reading Panel. This panel was created by legislation passed prior to the Reading Excellence Act and was envisioned as a group that would summarize reading research and thus make it easier to determine what practices were supported by scientifically based research. In essence, the government panel would determine practices eligible for federal funding. The panel was originally supposed to complete its task by January 1999. However, once convened, the panel petitioned the government for an extension because

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it simply was not possible to do the task in the time originally alloted.

The Association was active in nominating members for the panel, and 5 of the 14 panelists are Association members. The panel has engaged in a number of activities including conducting regional hearings at which many Association members and Board members testified. It has also conducted a series of open meetings, most of which either the Association's Executive Director Alan Farstrup or I attended.

The panel published an interim report, available online at www.nationalreadingpanel.org. This report gives the background information about the panel, summarizes the regional hearings, and gives a detailed explanation of the methodology the panel will use in evaluating research evidence for its reports. The Association Board and headquarters staff are following the work of the panel closely so that the Association will be in a position to provide appropriate and needed information at the time of the report's release.

A fifth manifestation of change is the Association's involvement with the Reading Excellence Act legislation that the U.S. Congress passed in final form in fall 1998. More than any other situation the activity around this act represents the cacophony of voices contesting reading instruction. In the next section, I will provide a narrative (clearly one that reflects my personal experiences and opinions) of the Association's involvement with the Reading Excellence Act.

The Reading Excellence Act

The Reading Excellence Act began its life as H.B. 2416. This original version, sponsored by U.S. Congressman William Goodling of Pennsylvania and introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on November 7, 1997, contained many elements that were unacceptable to reading and language arts professionals. The purpose of the act was to funnel funds to high-poverty districts for (a) professional development for teachers, (b) tutoring programs, and (c) family literacy initiatives. While some applauded the use of federal dollars for professional development and family literacy efforts, many were less certain about the possible uses of public dollars to support private vendors for tutoring.

However, there were three features of the bill that were particularly troublesome to the reading community—the definition of reading, the definition of research, and the constitution of the panel to review and recommend the most meritorious applications for funding. In the early versions of the bill, reading was defined as follows:

> The term "reading" means the process of comprehending the meaning of written text by depending on—
> (a) the ability to use phonics skills, that is the knowledge of letters and sounds, to decode printed words quickly and effortlessly, both silently and aloud;
> (b) the ability to use previously learned strategies for reading comprehension; and
> (c) the ability to think critically about the meaning, message, and aesthetic value of the text.

In addition the original bill defined reading readiness:

> The term "reading readiness" means activities that—
> (a) provide experience and opportunity for language development;
> (b) create an appreciation of the written word;
> (c) develop an awareness of printed language, the alphabet, and phonemic awareness; and
> (d) develop an understanding that spoken and written language is made up of phonemes, syllables, and words.

Reliable, replicable research was also defined:

> The term "reliable replicable research" means objective, valid, scientific studies that—
> (a) include rigorously defined samples of subjects that are sufficiently large and representative to support the general conclusions drawn;
> (b) rely on measurements that meet established standards of reliability and validity;
> (c) test competing theories where multiple theories exist;
> (d) are subjected to peer review before their results are published; and
> (e) discover effective strategies for improving reading skills.

Many reading professionals found the definitions of reading and reading readiness incomplete and too heavily focused on word recognition. They found the definition of research eliminated much educational research. The phrase *reliable, replicable research* was repeated more than 20 times throughout the bill, and at every opportunity the bill restricted activities funded only to those that were supported by reliable, replicable research. The phrase and the definition it invoked were associated with particular forms of both research and instruction substantially narrower than those existing in the field as a whole. The intent was to restrict the

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types of instruction and professional development funded by the bill.

The reading community also objected to the panel because panel membership was determined mainly by government agencies that had not traditionally been involved in classroom-based reading research. There was no pártipation from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)—the agency that funds most classroom research by reading educators. The inclusion of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) intensified fears that only instruction and professional development that was consistent with a narrow range of research and practice would be funded. The ultimate fear was that the federal government, having been effectively manipulated by a few special interest groups, would dictate practice. This was an unacceptable precedent.

Both the Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) instructed our Washington representative, Richard Long, to work for substantial changes in the bill. Although we were unsuccessful in changing the language on H.R. 2614, Long and representatives from IRA, NCTE, and several other literacy organizations were able to work with Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont in introducing an amended version of the Reading Excellence Act (Jeffords Amendment No. 3740, Senate, October 6, 1998). The amended version of the act substantially changed definitions, although the changes to the panel were less substantial.

The Jeffords amendment defined reading as follows:

> The term "reading" means a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:
> (a) The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print;
> (b) The ability to decode unfamiliar words;
> (c) The ability to read fluently;
> (d) Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension;
> (e) The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print; and
> (f) The development and maintenance of a motivation to read.

The term *reliable replicable research* was replaced with the term *scientifically based reading research* and defined:

> The term "scientifically based reading research"
> (a) means the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties; and
> (b) shall include research that—
> (i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
> (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusion drawn;
> (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluations and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
> (iv) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

Both these definitions were broader than the original definitions. The definitions of reading and reading readiness contained three of seven items that were focused on phonics and word identification. In the Jeffords version that ultimately passed only two of six focused at that level, but more important was that the definition was far more inclusive and more representative of our understanding of the complexity of the reading process and the extent to which prior knowledge, comprehension, and motivation are important components.

There were bigger changes in the definition of research. The original definition seemed to restrict acceptable research to large methods experiments. The Jeffords definitions made it clear that observational research was included in the definition. The phrase *established standards of reliability and validity*, which might have been construed to refer only to quantitative measures, was reworded to "relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluations and observers and across multiple measures and observations." The new wording clearly included qualitative research. The Association's view was that these changes were crucial. They made it clear that no one research paradigm could claim to be "scientific" and relegate others to the category "unscientific."

We were not able to change the composition of the panel, and we were unhappy with the idea that it would not contain representatives nominated by OERI. We were worried because ultimately it would be the panel that decided whether a state application was supported by

scientifically based research, and that the panel could possibly be biased toward particular research paradigms and instructional practices. However, the Jeffords version of the bill passed and became law.

What to do? Should we oppose the bill and encourage the states not to apply for the money? Or could the bill work in a way that benefited the field? The Board concluded that if properly implemented the Reading Excellence Act could benefit children and teachers in high-poverty schools, and so the Association decided to do what we could to ensure a quality implementation. In a news release (Butler, 1998) the Association noted that it supported the purposes of the act and was pleased with the broader definitions. However, it also noted some areas of concern:

> Despite its positive response to the overall bill, the Association is concerned about the following issues:
>
> - Allocation of funding—There is not enough total funding to make a significant impact at the local district level.
> - Control of education—A national panel advises the Secretary of Education on funding or disapproval of state applications. This is a cumbersome process which may undermine local control of education and may implement a too narrow vision of effective reading instruction.
> - Tutorial assistance—Grants may provide voucher-like funding for nonprofit agencies that could be hastily created and poorly qualified for providing the services needed by children who are already having problems.

Farstrup commented on some of these concerns, "We are still not satisfied with the heavy representation of federal employees on the peer review panel and call for the appointment of experienced, field-based reading professionals, not federal employees." On another point he noted, "If the after-school program is to be effective, it should be coordinated by a school-based, professionally qualified reading specialist."

Subsequently, the Board's Executive Committee met with Joseph Conaty, the official in charge of Reading Excellence Act implementation, to make it clear that we wanted to be helpful and wanted the legislation implemented in ways that helped children learn to read. When Conaty made requests for scientific research that supported good reading instruction Carol Santa (then president-elect of the Association) and I (as Director of the Research and Policy Division) drafted a document that would represent a broad range of research findings, which we forwarded to Conaty.

We were pleased with the outcomes of our efforts because *Learning to Read and Write*, the Association's joint position paper with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), was listed in the Reading Excellence Act guidelines for applications as one of the references that could be used to support applications. In addition we posted on the Association Web site a list of research studies that could be used to support the applications. This was much narrower than the one forwarded to Conaty because of our uncertainty about the constitution of the panel that would judge the applications. We felt that by narrowing the list we would decrease the possibility that a state application would be eliminated from the competition because it cited one of the studies on our list. In addition the Association gave permission for the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) to copy and distribute to the states a set of *Reading Research Quarterly* articles that would be useful for supporting applications. Those articles were also available in downloadable form on the Association Web site. Conaty spoke at the Association's 1999 convention in San Diego, California, to explain the act and the application process and to answer questions. In addition we have worked with the National Institute for Literacy—charged with disseminating information related to the act—to assure that the Association will be seen as a resource. As the implementation of the act continues we will continue to do what we can to ensure its success.

Different people will have different takes on this narrative. Some individuals and groups have taken the stance that we should work against the implementation and have it repealed. My personal take is that the Association, working in concert with other literacy organizations, did reasonably well. We were successful in changing the most onerous sections of the bill. We participated effectively in a democratic process that will fund activities to help children in some of the nation's poorest schools learn to read. In a democracy where many individuals and groups vie for power, it is rare that any particular group accomplishes all that it wishes in any piece of legislation. It is always a judgment call to de-

cide which features of the legislation are crucial and which less so.

What the Association must continue to do

The Association's basic position, that teachers should make the decisions about how children are taught to read, is in jeopardy. It is increasingly likely that instructional methodologies for reading instruction in the U.S. will be circumscribed by legislation and strongly influenced by federal funding sources. For any number of reasons, the public is not convinced that teachers are the best decision makers. What must we (the Association's 90,000+ individual and institutional members and the over 350,000 affiliates worldwide) do to assure that every child has access to excellent reading instruction?

There are two basic goals we must achieve. First, we as professionals must be capable of providing excellent reading instruction. Second, we must communicate our expertise effectively to various stakeholders such as parents, the media, legislators, and policy makers. Four critical objectives will move us toward the first goal.

- *Every primary classroom must have a well-qualified teacher who has the knowledge and capacities requisite for teaching reading.*

This is the first recommendation in the Title I reauthorization document (available from pubinfo@reading.org). In many cases unqualified and unsupervised aides are teaching reading. This must stop. We know that in some schools, particularly those serving high-poverty communities, the failure rates in reading are simply unacceptable. Often these schools are struggling with inexperienced or unqualified teachers hired through emergency certification programs.

- *Every teacher preparation program graduate must be able to teach reading well.*

Many entry-level teachers begin with only three to six semester hour credits related to teaching reading. This is not enough. While excellent models exist for preparing beginning teachers to teach reading, most beginning teachers do not go through these programs. For example, at many universities one option for undergraduates is to take a reading specialization, which involves up to 20 extra hours in reading-related courses and practicums. Students who go through these programs are more confident and skilled at reading instruction as they begin their teaching.

On May 5, 1999 at its annual convention in San Diego the International Reading Association announced the formation of the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction (Commission on Teacher Preparation, CTP). The long-term goal of the CTP is to provide sound research-based recommendations for the preparation of reading teachers. While the Association's Standards for Reading Professionals (revised in 1998) are research based, the individual standards have never been explicitly linked to particular pieces of research. CTP will initiate the effort to provide such links. The CTP is a 3-year effort devoted to the study of excellent 4-year undergraduate teacher preparation programs. In choosing the undergraduate program as our starting point, we are recognizing that the majority of teachers in the United States are prepared in such programs.

The eight members of the CTP were chosen through a competitive application process that included providing descriptions of the program, the faculty, a brief vignette of a beginning teacher from the program teaching reading, and commentaries by various stakeholders on that vignette. The members are as follows:

James V. Hoffman (Chair)	University of Texas at Austin, USA
Joyce C. Fine	Florida International University, Miami, USA
Deborah Eldridge	Hunter College, New York, New York, USA
Amy Seely Flint	Indiana University, Bloomington and Indianapolis, USA
Denise Littleton	Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia, USA
Shane Templeton	University of Nevada at Reno, USA
Diane Barone	University of Nevada at Reno, USA
Miriam Martinez	University of Texas at San Antonio, USA
Rachelle Loven	University of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA

The CTP will conduct a series of three studies: features of excellence (to identify common features of programs selected for the CTP), a study of beginning teachers (to describe reading instruction of first-year graduates in relation to a

comparison group of similar graduates from programs not emphasizing reading instruction), and a national survey (to describe teacher education programs nationwide in relation to features of excellence). The CTP will seek funding to conduct a large-scale excellence study (a coordinated set of studies across sites that systematically varies the excellence factors, program structures, and other important variables).

- *We must promote conditions of practice that allow good teachers to achieve optimal results.*

This means making sure that teachers have reasonable class sizes, adequate instructional materials, and enough planning time. We must join with associations and partners who have similar concerns and support efforts to achieve these ends. We must carefully orchestrate efforts that include developing resolutions and position papers, collaborating with legislators, and supporting the efforts of other organizations with similar goals.

- *Finally, we must be sure that we know what we know and what we do not know and support research to answer our questions.*

There is an extensive research base underlying reading instruction. In the last decade we have learned a lot about the reading process, and there have been many studies of various aspects of reading instruction. The major problem here is in defining the term *works*. Everyone expects the field to be able to identify what works and to use methods that work. The field as a whole must either agree to a general definition or be very clear and explicit at all times when using the term.

I raise this issue because there has been so much rhetoric with statements like, "30 years of research support direct explicit phonics instruction." Much of the rhetoric has been encouraged by a paper, *30 Years of Research: What We Now Know About How Children Learn to Read*, which has been published in various forms but is usually attributed to Bonnie Grossen (1997) of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. The paper claims to summarize the NICHD research, and was featured prominently in the California and Texas legislation of phonics instruction. It has been subsequently discredited (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1998). Reid Lyon, Director of the NICHD reading research program, has made it clear in recent publications that the NICHD research does not support a beginning reading program focused primarily on phonics. He has said that NICHD research

> is consistent with the larger body of research in showing that explicitly teaching phonics and awareness skills is an important part of early reading instruction. Gains in early reading skills are mediated by the effect of the intervention on phonological processing abilities. The interventions used in the NICHD studies, however, involve more than explicit teaching of phonics. They also include good literature, reading for enjoyment, and other practices believed to facilitate the development of reading skills and literacy. Hence the NICHD studies are consistent with educational research highlighting the importance of balanced approaches to reading instruction. (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998, p. 50)

Researchers and materials developers must be cautious in their claims and work to fund research that has the potential to support strong claims about what works.

Achieving the second goal, communicating with stakeholders, is also crucial. Parents, the media, legislators, and policy makers are important constituencies who must consider us knowledgeable and competent. Earlier I cited an article by Richard Allington (in press) about the influence of research on policy. He analyzed three recent legislative examples: class size, phonics, and bilingual instruction. There is a strong body of research that supports the effects of smaller class sizes on children's achievement. The research surrounding phonics is contested. Professionals who define reading as the ability to pronounce words point out that systematic phonics instruction results in children's increased ability to pronounce lists of pseudowords and real words. Professionals who define reading more comprehensively suggest that there is no clear evidence that children who have systematic phonics instruction become more fluent and comprehend better than children who learned to read using other methods. In the case of bilingual instruction there is a clear research consensus that bilingual instruction leads to better achievement; however, the legislation passed in California outlawed such instruction.

There were clear differences in the level of research consensus in these areas. In one area the research supported the legislation, in one the research was equivocal, and in one the research was clearly against the legislation. Despite the differences in research support, legislation re-

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ducing class sizes, mandating phonics instruction, and dictating English only rather than bilingual education passed in California, and similar legislation has been proposed and passed in other states. In each case, however, opinion polls showed that the public supported the legislation.

If we want research to influence policy, we must communicate the findings of research effectively to the general public as tapped by opinion polls. Several important objectives will help us meet this goal.

- *We must all be clear about our definitions for the word* works.

Often in studies we have multiple dependent measures, and the effects are different for different measures. For example, if comparisons find that there is an advantage for method A on two measures, and a clear advantage for method B on another measure, and on two other measures there is no clear advantage for either, which method "works"?

- *Researchers must communicate findings in ways that preserve scholarly integrity and convey the importance and usefulness of the findings.*

They must be clear on when they are talking from data and when they are giving considered opinions. They must constantly respect the limits of the operationalized definitions of their studies. They must be very clear regarding the context, relative value, ramifications, and, especially, the limitations of the data.

- *Teachers must understand and be able to communicate the influences that research, theory and practice have on the instructional decisions they make.*

Teachers have daily contact with the children of the public. They are in a strategic position to communicate the important findings of the extant research base in terms related to specific children. Teachers can communicate their instructional decisions in terms that clearly mark how research findings have been implemented and how their own classroom research has guided their decisions. They should also communicate what influences their decisions when research findings are unclear. The field as a whole will gain substantial credibility when teachers are able to do this. Substantial increases in training for both inservice and preservice teachers will be necessary.

- *The Association must systematically communicate with media and policy audiences.*

We are the largest literacy organization in the world, and we have access to impressive expertise. We must be sure that anyone considering policy related to literacy thinks of us first.

Throughout the article I have referred to Association efforts to increase our communication capacities. We have added a staff member in our Washington office to improve our ability to follow legislative efforts in the states; we have focused on placing the Association's expertise squarely in the public arena; we have increased our publications efforts; we have increased the number of position papers, resolutions, press releases, and press conferences; and we have held one-day forums across the U.S. to highlight crucial issues such as beginning reading instruction and early childhood literacy development. Other efforts are in the planning stages.

I conclude this article with both hope and trepidation—hope because I know that within the organization we have both the talent and the will to achieve these goals, and trepidation because I know that moving an Association that is 90,000 members strong and growing is no small task. Taking proactive stands and placing our expertise squarely in the public arena will not happen without considerable work and some anguish. There are many issues for which 90,000 members cannot find agreement. Inevitably there will be conflict. It is also difficult to perform effectively all of the time, and each time we take a stand, we increase the number of opportunities for mistakes. However, reading is simply too important for the Association to observe at a distance as other stakeholders with less knowledge and expertise set policy. We want the world to know that the International Reading Association is the place to come for credible information on reading instruction.

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Claude Goldenberg

Commentary

The voices of researchers: Conflict and consensus in reading research and policy

By focusing on the considerable consensus about literacy rather than on differences, researchers can contribute to policy.

That great social philosopher, Dilbert, tells the story of Tod, who makes a presentation on behalf of the research department one day. Tod distributes a handout and tells the audience that the research department has done a study to assess the value of their previous research. "Sadly," Tod reports, "all of our past work was either ignored or totally misinterpreted by idiots." Tod is unsparing: "Such as yourselves." So, Tod continues, the research department has decided that instead of doing more research, "we'll just lie." Now for the carrot: "Play along," Tod says, his eyes narrowing, "and we'll make sure the 'industry salaries' study goes your way." Tod looks at his watch: "Well, it's 2:00, and that's quitting time in the research department." Wally, the little bespectacled bald guy with tufts for hair, looks at Dilbert: "You're not my role model anymore. I've found another."

It is easy to understand the contempt with which the public sometimes regards researchers, particularly researchers who till the behavioral and social science fields. Social research often seems to produce trivia masquerading as deep insight. Or else researchers themselves seem to be manipulative and self-serving, as suggested by the famous saying that there are three kinds of lies: big ones, little ones, and statistics. How many times have we heard teachers and others comment cynically (if incorrectly) that you can find a study to prove either side of any issue? Former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education Christopher Cross called it Cross's Corollary: "For every study in education research, there are an equal or greater number of opposing studies." He was quoted in an article by Carl Kaestle entitled "The Awful Reputation of Educational Research" (1993).

There are many reasons for this awful reputation, but researchers themselves seem to take pleasure in needlessly undermining one another. I recently came across a *Baltimore Sun* article (Lally & Price, 1998) about reading that contained this exchange: Siegfried Engelmann of direct instruction fame called whole language proponents "brain dead," while Kenneth Goodman observed that phonics represents a "flat-earth view of the world." So much for civil discourse.

What started out as a "great debate" about how children learn to read at some point erupted into the "reading wars." The release of every new study or report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or new legislative proposal signals a battle on the horizon. There is widespread disagreement, fueled by mutual antagonism, ideological fervor, and deep suspicion, over the best way or ways to help students become successful readers and writers. The accusations and recriminations sometimes fly fast and furious, partisans for each side often declaring that they are the true last best hope for children and teachers. Policy makers, the public, and even some educators might be forgiven for looking elsewhere for answers.

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And it is this elsewhere that worries me. When the research seems to cancel itself out, you can be sure of one thing: People will use research—if they use it all—to support what they already believe. We are seeing precisely this in many places around the U.S. Policy makers and the public will instead rely on some version of common sense, personal experience, and prejudice. I am a big fan of common sense, but it's often not a good guide for determining policy. If we relied only on common sense we would still think the sun revolves around the earth. Personal experience is also a good thing but by definition is idiosyncratic and simply inadequate to form a knowledge base (even if combined with common sense). As for prejudice—it will always lurk. But researchers who are forever nullifying one another are simply providing more room for prejudice to take root and spread its influence.

Let me be clear about this: I do not wish to obscure or minimize the importance of real differences and issues in reading research and policy. My concern is with the zealous focus on differences that creates the impression of utter, unrepentent chaos in our field, chaos that contributes to the "awful reputation" of our research and that poorly serves students, teachers, and the public. In fact, I don't believe the field is nearly as chaotic as many believe or would like to portray. There is actually considerable agreement, for example, on the importance of phonological awareness, learning the systematic relationships between letters and sounds, and meaningful and authentic literacy experiences. Whether there is an optimal "balance" and what that actually looks like for different learners is far from resolved. But we do have reasonable research-based consensus on some key ingredients of a healthy literacy diet.

Whose voices matter in our great conversation about how best to help children learn to read? Educators', parents', and students' voices matter; so too do the voices of the public and of policy makers and political leaders. Researchers' voices should count as well, since they—we—have an important contribution to make. But we must take care that research and researchers not become just background noise, an incoherent thicket filled with little more than sound and fury.

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Shirley C. Raines

Commentary

Educators influencing legislators: Commentary and the Kentucky case

Educators in this state were effective advocates for legislative restructuring of schools.

Cathy Roller's article in this issue, "The International Reading Association Responds to a Highly Charged Policy Environment," is a case study in advocacy. Voices of professional educators have become the other voices in the controversy over legislating educational practice. The decision of the Association's Board of Directors to write position papers is a first step; however, position papers are easily ignored without expert educators' direct interactions with legislators to help construct better policies. Roller's account of the passing of the Reading Excellence Act in the U.S. is a good example of these dynamics.

In Kentucky, high-stakes accountability with rewards and sanctions for schools has been in place since the inception of KERA, the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. Many educators were teaching students successfully long before KERA, but it took an act of the legislature and the state courts to get the attention of other educators to define the state school system as dysfunctional, and to emphasize that student failure was no longer acceptable. The legislative act was necessary before substantial change in education occurred.

Why are federal and state legislatures setting policies and restructuring entire state school systems? The answer to this question is that achievement gaps in educational attainment alarm legislators and the citizens they represent. Despite the slight increase in National Assessment of Educational Progress reading scores in 1998, we are failing to teach the children of the poor beyond basic literacy, with 58–68% of poor children at or below this level (Donahue, Voelld, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1998). The phrase *achievement gap* is now in the rhetoric of school board meetings, educational media, grassroots advocacy organizations, and in state and federal legislatures.

I could not agree more with James Hoffman's argument in this issue against centralization and control, reductionist curricula, and groups attempting to silence professional dialogue and debate. However, whether or not policy makers should legislate educational practice is no longer the question. They are doing so. The issue has become whether professional educators can use research and effective practice to influence policy makers' decisions. We must make our voices heard.

A case study of the Kentucky experience of working with legislators in passing Senate Bill 186, the literacy bill, is an example of how to bring professional voices to the dialogue. Like many other bills introduced in state legislatures around the U.S., the early version of the Kentucky bill contained a narrow definition of reading and reading instruction. However, state Senators Jack Westwood and Dan Kelly sought information from several sources before filing the Kentucky bill. They asked for assistance from a Reading Recovery teacher, an education reform researcher, university reading faculty, and me. Senator Westwood even traveled to Arkansas to learn about a statewide literacy initiative. Working with legislative staff and with us, Senator Westwood redrafted the bill. Passing the bill required support from both Democrats

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and Republicans, as well as designation of resources for the various constituencies of the public schools, higher education, and the Kentucky Department of Education.

A key turning point in the success of the bill was a legislative field trip. Speaker of the House Jody Richardson, key leaders from both parties, and Governor Paul Patton visited an elementary school to see a demonstration lesson. During the legislative committee hearings, International Reading Association members, school district superintendents, and Reading Recovery teachers inundated their representatives with support for the main concepts of the bill.

The enacted bill presently provides funds for a Collaborative Center on Literacy Development, where courses, follow-up, staff development, and research are conducted. Eight state universities formed a partnership to provide these services throughout the state. In addition, a clearinghouse of research information is provided for schools to determine the changes they want to make in reading instruction. Schools apply for reading incentive grants, administered by the Kentucky Department of Education, for teams of teachers to improve instruction in the primary levels.

The negotiated bill would not have been successful without Senator Westwood's passion for education, the reading teachers who were the voices of Senator Kelly's constituency, Governor Patton, and leaders from both parties. Without the dedicated legislative staff members who counseled our team of educators, arranged for our testimony, and cut through the legislative and educational jargon, the negotiations would have broken down. Working with this one bill required literally hundreds of hours, extreme patience, and the willingness to keep the dialogue open. I am convinced that without the commitment of educators, the availability of experts, and a great deal of trust in working together our voices would not have been heard.

Without the commitment of educators, the availability of experts, and a great deal of trust in working together our voices would not have been heard.

The Association should be applauded for influencing the Reading Excellence Act, as should state councils for their work with state legislatures throughout the U.S. The remaining challenge is to devote the time and mount the resources for effective advocacy. The achievement gap is real in Kentucky for poor and minority children, just as it is throughout the world. The next round of legislation will not be as kind to educators if we do not close the gap.

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Making kids winners: New perspectives about literacy from urban elementary school principals

Two school principals share the stories of how they have used nontraditional administrative approaches as strategies for connecting home and school and for improving the literacy achievement of their culturally diverse students.

> Over the years, I've seen it's necessary to work together as a team. It can't be "I am the boss, and the teachers' job is to do whatever I tell them to do." I can't work that way. One of the things that I did in the beginning of the year was to have my parking sign that says "Reserved for the Principal" pulled out from in front of the building and put at the furthest spot [possible] because I am, literally and figuratively, the least important person here. This place could run for 2 or 3 years without a principal. It isn't gonna run 1 day without a secretary, and a custodian, and the teachers who come into the classroom and work with our students. (Urban elementary principal)

We believe that these words from Mr. Carter (pseudonym) convey the reality of many principals working in today's urban U.S. schools. Drug and alcohol abuse, high crime rates, incessant violence, and extreme poverty are just a few of the negative ecological factors that create challenging educational circumstances for such schools and their surrounding communities. Traditionally, teachers and parents shouldered the blame for students' low test scores and poor academic performance. More recently, principals have become targets; they have found themselves face to face with the daunting task of educating students in an urban community plagued by multiple risks. The purpose of our article is to highlight the urban principal as a stakeholder who is within the midst of the crisis in public education, but whose voice is often marginalized. More specifically, we illuminate the struggles and challenges of two elementary school principals who have become empowered to work proactively with teachers, parents, and students in an effort to enhance culturally diverse students' literacy development.

In most studies of urban schooling (see Anyon, 1997; Goodlad, 1984; Kozol, 1991), the voice of the principal is noticeably absent. We surmised that many researchers and practitioners perceive principals to be disconnected from the complexities of teaching and learning in the classroom. Their administrative positions can be seen as removing them from the day-to-day challenges of managing and instructing students, and of dealing with their families. Consequently, teachers and staff often perceive their principal to be "the boss" who handles the organizational affairs of the school, disciplines students and teachers, distributes resources (i.e., personnel, equipment, and materials), facilitates staff relations, and enforces rules and regulations (Bliss, 1991; Parsons, 1958). For decades, the image of the traditional urban principal has been the organizational manager, whose piles of paperwork in the office emphasize the bureaucratic nature of schooling and the hierarchical nature of authority, responsibility, and control within educational settings (Bliss, 1991; Parsons, 1958; Seashore Louis & Miles, 1991).

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Contemporary urban principals get a new attitude

Mr. Carter's words connote that the role of the urban principal is changing with the times. Recent studies of urban schools, particularly the school reform and effective schools research, have thrust urban principals into the limelight. Because such schools are now viewed as "communities" within these two theoretical frameworks, there has been greater emphasis upon team approaches toward administration, instruction, and home-school connections (Bliss, 1991; Ramirez, Webb, & Guthrie, 1991). As a result, the role of the urban principal has shifted from manager to builder (Polite & McClure, 1997). For example, urban principals encourage teachers and students to buy into their vision for the school by fostering a collegial environment that is inspirational and educational (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Further, urban principals have become responsible for building collaborative partnerships between teachers and parents, implementing programs that connect home and school, and creating inroads with community agencies. Urban principals are responsible for understanding multiple perspectives (i.e., teachers, students, parents, and community leaders) and addressing the competing needs and interests of these groups. This is an essential task because the success of the school is deeply nested within the interdependent relationships of these groups (Enomoto, 1997). Consequently, urban principals can no longer afford to sit in their offices tucked away from the rest of the school; their futures are inextricably connected to that of their school, its constituents, and the surrounding community.

Urban principals are critically aware that this interdependence of school, home, and community also creates a greater sense of accountability for the effectiveness of their schools (Osterman, Crow, & Rosen, 1997). Often, they find themselves in the eye of the storm as pressure for higher test scores and better-educated students mounts from multiple sources—the school district, the parents, the community, businesses, and society at large (Bogotch & Taylor, 1993). The pressure that urban principals feel is all too real—they are ultimately held responsible for low student achievement and test scores, despite the acute lack of financial resources, personnel, and other educational materials that plague inner-city schools (National Council of Jewish Women, 1999).

Urban principals whose time is largely spent managing these financial struggles are less likely to find time to fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders. Yet this is an extremely critical role for urban principals, particularly in elementary schools where teachers often function in isolation (Bliss, 1991; Peterson & Lezotte, 1991). Urban principals can be completely overwhelmed by the prospect of having conversations about curriculum and instruction because the rules about "good" teaching are always changing, and they feel uncomfortable admitting that they don't have all of the answers (Neufeld, 1997). Further, some urban principals are reluctant to discuss instruction because they are uncertain about how to move teachers, particularly those who doubt or are stubborn, toward a unified vision of teaching and learning (Neufeld, 1997).

However, urban principals are finding it difficult *not* to become involved with instructional issues. More often, they are being drawn into heated discussions with teachers around effective instruction. One particularly visible discussion centers on the literacy achievement of urban students. Principals must deal with unresolved debates around whole language and phonics and must still respond to pressures to raise students' reading achievement scores on standardized tests. Consequently, as the instructional leaders, urban principals now find themselves labeled as "incompetent" and "weak" when they do not deliver better results. Thus, urban principals are now finding themselves in the hot seat that teachers traditionally have occupied where issues in literacy instruction are concerned.

In addition, urban principals are given the task of connecting the cultural literacies of home and school. Within schools, principals are responsible for facilitating an environment that (a) emphasizes the interdependence between teaching and learning, (b) sets high expectations for staff and students, (c) establishes guidelines for student and teacher behavior, and (d) expresses a generally positive attitude toward education and young people (Bliss, 1991; Seashore Louis & Miles, 1991; Peterson & Lezotte, 1991). When teachers and students participate in a school culture they perceive as productive, respectful, and

supportive, they are likely to coconstruct classroom discourse that facilitates the acquisition of school-based literacy (Corno, 1989). Establishing a collaborative school culture is critical in urban schools, since this environment can be very uninviting for parents. By increasing connections between home and school literacies, urban principals can develop an academic environment that respects the multicultural literacies of students and their families. In sum, successful principals of urban schools are often perceived as miracle workers. However, to label them in this manner is to miss an important opportunity to understand how principals manage their professional lives within schools.

In the remainder of this article, we share the insightful stories of two principals who have worked in the same urban, midwestern school—we'll call it Baker Elementary. These two men were extremely sensitive to their students, the majority of whom come from culturally and linguistically diverse families and low socioeconomic backgrounds (Michigan School Report, 1998). They worked tirelessly with parents, teachers, and the community in an effort to provide a quality education and have experienced the triumphs and the hardships associated with the urban principalship. We see the narratives of these two principals as creating a new "safe space" for other administrators to enter the conversation about the intersections of urban communities, their schools, and their members.

Mr. Williams's story: District pressure, low test scores, frustrated teachers

Mr. Williams (pseudonym) was principal at Baker Elementary from 1989 to 1997. He had been an elementary and middle school teacher for 6 years and, as a result, he had a wide range of teaching experiences with students from diverse backgrounds. As an African American, he was deeply concerned about the welfare and the educational experiences of minority students. This focus is desperately needed in many inner-city areas because the minority-student population is typically disenfranchised in urban educational institutions (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Reglin, 1995).

Mr. Williams felt that his determination was critical to being an educator and administrator. He also believed it was critical not to allow hearsay and negative publicity to deter him from working in urban schools. This kind of resiliency is essential for someone who is walking into the lion's den of an urban school, as Mr. Williams's comments exemplified.

> When I came to the school, I arrived at a place that was totally gone defunct. A certain individual that had stayed there, for I think 7 years, had not done anything, and the community was in an uproar, and the teachers went downtown and complained. The board members ended up forcing him out, so I came under very stressful circumstances. When I got there, a woman that I knew who was an assistant elementary director told me she was glad to finally see me. She also told me, "You don't know what you've got." And she went right out the door without another word. I was like, "Whoa, what is this?" And I knew I was in for something.

Mr. Williams soon discovered that the "something" was a student population whom he described as "very high need." Of the 454 students at the school, 98% were from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods that were violent and drug infested. Further, 67% of his families were mobile, and during the school year these families moved up to 4 times causing children to relocate to different schools several times per year. Undoubtedly, these factors had severe consequences upon the literacy development of these children who, on average, were reading at least 1 year below grade level (Michigan School Report, 1998). Although Mr. Williams initially had difficulties with some teachers who constantly blamed students and their families for the school's negative publicity, low achievement, and poor test scores, he did not let this deter him from challenging these negative attitudes.

> When I got to the school, some of the staff members were always blaming the child. The child's poor, the child can't speak English, the child is bad. I said, "You know what? The best child you got is the best parent you got. I can't trade in the parents; I can't trade in the children. What comes through that door is ours so let's get ready."

As an urban principal, Mr. Williams helped the teachers "get ready" to work with Baker students by being supportive of them. His approach to leadership focused upon building a culture of empowerment by treating teachers in a professional manner and fostering a commitment to effective teaching (Peterson & Lezotte, 1991). Mr. Williams explained as follows:

There are teachers who are good, who have good ethics, but some have problems giving the heart. Commitments have a heart, so teaching should have a heart. When you've got heart, ain't nothing gonna stop you. And many teachers there had heart. I can honestly say that. They were expected to do more with those kids than the average teacher in this district does, and they worked hard to do that. My job was to try to help them find that heart. I had retreats for them; I tried to give them the best. The teachers knew that I'd try to get everything for them that they needed. I cared about them as much as I cared about the kids.

Clearly, Mr. Williams's comments illustrate the primacy of a supportive administrator in urban schools. As principal, he understood that teachers must be valued and respected because they are working directly with students and families. He perceived his administrative role as one that communicated his appreciation of the jobs that they did. However, support was not enough. Mr. Williams soon realized that he could not simply tell the teachers what to do; he had to join them on their journey in developing more effective instructional strategies.

Moreover, Mr. Williams recognized that he was disconnected from what was actually occurring in classrooms. This disconnection caused him to undergo a transition in his role of urban principal. His role was changing from an organizational manager to an instructional leader. Bliss (1991) asserted that urban principals' direct involvement in curriculum and instructional issues in the classroom typically stem from the political and social ramifications of low test scores and poorly educated students.

For Mr. Williams and Baker Elementary School, declining reading scores on the statewide test was the central problem. Mr. Williams commented that "literacy was one of his biggest problems, the kids at this school just don't score well, and sometimes the teachers and I felt that we had no immediate or long-term solution to our literacy woes." In order to improve the test scores, Mr. Williams organized several meetings with his teachers to discuss the situation. In the following section, we provide excerpts from one such faculty meeting. For clarity, we specifically identify Mr. Williams's comments and provide general comments from several teachers:

Mr. Williams: Well, I guess you probably already know why I called this faculty meeting today. Well, it's about our test scores. Believe me, I know that you have worked very hard this year, but our test scores are extremely low again. In some areas, our students scored lower than they did last year. I know it's frustrating. I'm frustrated and I know that you are frustrated, but we are going to have to rectify the situation. I guess you heard the rumors that our school might be taken over by the State Department of Education. I wonder what are we doing wrong? I know we can't be doing everything wrong here at Baker.

Teacher 1: Why are schools judged as "good or bad" simply based on test scores? I don't think it's fair and I'm upset. Every year we hear the same old thing—"your students scored low."

Teacher 2: I mean, we are working as hard as we can with our students. But let's face it, our kids come to school with real problems, and we are, like, expected to work miracles. It's really hard sometimes to get these kids really motivated to learn.

Teacher 3: I mean, realistically, what can we do about the test scores? I'm so tired of hearing the same news year in and year out. I feel like quitting and doing something else. [Mr. Williams said that several teachers agreed with this teacher.]

Mr. Williams: We can't feel sorry for ourselves. I know that we are in a tough spot, but we have to work together to do something about this situation.

Teacher 4: But, what? I'm at a loss and I'm tired. I mean, they tell us not to teach to the test, and I don't want to teach to the test, but I'm beginning to feel like I should.

Teacher 5: If we teach to the test, the test will become our curriculum, and I don't think that's the answer.

Teacher 6: If that's not the answer, then what is the answer? What should we do? How can we help these kids do better? It seems like we are between a rock and a hard place.

The fact that Mr. Williams organized these meetings and tried to talk about these literacy, instructional, and curricular issues represents a more hands-on approach that is critical for urban principals who want to improve their students' academic performance (Bliss, 1991; Seashore Louis & Miles, 1991). Typically, urban principals delegate these issues around curriculum and instruction to grade-level chairpersons or subcommittees. Mr. Williams explained to us why he could not do so.

As principal, the district and the state held me directly responsible for the low test scores. I expected teachers to help students to do better on [the] test, but I really didn't know how to tell them to do so. It's a very complicated issue. I can't just

> go into the classroom with the magic cure; we have to all put our heads together and think how we are gonna help these kids do better. So I can't just concentrate on the administrative end; I have to really work on the instructional end as well. Because what's really killing us is low test scores and our kids' failure on literacy-related issues—mainly reading and writing.

In order to help teachers think about curriculum and instructional issues around literacy, Mr. Williams decided to focus upon parent involvement. Edwards and Pleasants (1997) affirmed that students' literacy development can be enhanced when parents are involved in their children's educational lives. After taking time to talk with families, Mr. Williams discovered that parents were not interested in or aware of their children's difficulties in reading and writing because they were caught in financial crises. Often, they were evicted from their homes or left before they had to pay rent. Although some parents were on welfare, others worked two and three legitimate jobs to survive, while others sold drugs. Mr. Williams described the desperate situations that many parents faced.

> We gotta find some way of meeting the basic needs of the kids. Parents were saying, "I can't meet the needs of my kids, so don't tell me about learning and school." These parents were worried about where they're gonna eat, where they're gonna sleep, if they have to fight.... And the most amazing part of what I saw in this crack cocaine community was that a lot of them didn't use it. They were the sellers and the dealers. I've never seen so many mothers in prison. They were selling drugs because the one thing they wanted for their child was to come to school looking good. They remember how they felt when they didn't look good going to school. But before that would happen, they would pay the neighbor off to make sure that she'd take care of her kids in case anything happened. So we are dealing with basic survival here, survival of the family and of the kids.

These issues were overwhelming to Mr. Williams because he could not find a way to connect students' life experiences in this urban community to literacy curriculum and instruction. He could not count on the parents to be consistently involved in their children's education, and the teachers were slowly losing heart and interest in teaching "these kinds of kids." Mr. Williams was completely overwhelmed; his plate was full with the complexity of issues surrounding the low literacy scores and low academic achievement. When he took this job, Mr. Williams knew that he had a "tough juggling act" but he still had to deal with the bottom line of improving test scores and improving the literacy curriculum. Even more disheartening, Mr. Williams did not receive much support from the school district in his endeavor to transform Baker Elementary. In the end, Mr. Williams resigned because he was tired of fighting with the school board for a new building, better materials, and additional faculty members. The year after he left, an interim principal came to the school. The interim principal had tremendous difficulty at Baker Elementary, and the following year a new principal, Mr. Carter, was hired. It is to Mr. Carter's story that we now turn.

Mr. Carter's story: Address the real issue—community mental health

> When I first came to Baker Elementary, it was a complete mess. We had just been reconstituted...our class size had been reduced, and we had some additional funding for reading programs, like Reading Recovery and our tutoring program. As a result, the district expected major improvement on the reading scores, despite the fact that those scores had been extremely low for several years. I was brought here to make some positive changes because it seemed that the interim principal couldn't handle the job.

Mr. Carter's words convey the challenge of being principal at Baker Elementary School. Although he arrived in September 1998, the issues that the school faced, particularly those around literacy and academic achievement, were similar to those that Mr. Williams faced 10 years earlier. Consequently, Mr. Carter was selected by the district to become principal because, like Mr. Williams, he had an unusual administrative approach. Many urban principals manage their schools as though they were organizational islands with self-contained problems and solutions (Sergiovanni, 1994). In contrast, Mr. Carter viewed his school as part of an intricate ecological system that included family, community, and other social institutions (Enomoto, 1997). Grounded in his former work as an urban planner, Mr. Carter used a "systems" approach to highlight connections between the school and its community.

> The demographics of an area are important, especially for a school. Problems and issues that the school faces are set within a certain geographical context, so the housing, welfare, and mental health issues all become salient to schools.

> Principals tend to think their students have discipline problems, so many urban schools are getting more police in there to handle the kids. But the problem is not discipline; it's community mental health. When the community is not healthy, kids will come to schools and act out. We need to define school problems and solutions in terms of mental health.

This "mental health" approach illuminates the interconnectedness of school, family, and community. Mr. Carter's perspective that the mental health of institutions such as families, communities, and schools affect students' educational experiences is well established in the literature on school counseling (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Schmidt, 1993). Schmidt (1993) suggested that effective principals and other school administrators should pay attention to the elements that contribute to mentally healthy learning environments, such as parent involvement, caring and supportive school personnel, and high teacher and student morale.

Mr. Carter recognized that social and community-related issues could potentially mitigate educational outcomes. Similarly, Edwards, Pleasants, and Franklin (1999) affirmed that

> ...schools and teachers must realize that children do not live in a utopia free of problems that plague adults. Children are part of society, and what happens in their family, community, and school affects them and all aspects of their development. (p. xix)

Although these community and social issues are salient, particularly for children from diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, they are often dismissed or ignored by school districts that are concerned only about the business of educating children. Mr. Carter explained as follows:

> [In] places where there are people of color, the finger gets pointed, not at the people because that would be a very racist thing... but it gets pointed at the institution where those people go. And they [the district] say, "You haven't done for those people what you ought to be doing." And the issue is that their stories about real-life survival aren't being told.... Any time you try to bring those stories into the discussion to say, "Let's deal with the problems in the community and in society," they get washed off the table by your own school system. It's a shame that people... can't or won't address the real issue—the fundamental issues of what's happening in our community and our society.

Like Mr. Williams, Mr. Carter recognized the importance of supporting parents' involvement by listening to their stories in ways that communicated respect and empathy. Further, administrators and teachers who listen to parents are likely to elicit personal knowledge that can connect students to the literacy curriculum (Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Edwards et al., 1999).

In an effort to create a mentally healthy educational environment, Mr. Carter used an adaptation of what Edwards et al. (1999) called "parent stories." Through a set of open-ended questions, parents are invited to tell a story that provides rich information about their child's traditional and nontraditional literacy experiences in the home. In their book, Edwards and her colleagues included the Edwards-Pleasants Questionnaire as a framework for crafting questions to elicit parent responses that are both complex and insightful. We mention just a few examples from the questionnaire:

- What is a normal weekday routine for you and your child? What is a normal weekend like?
- What does your family enjoy doing together?
- How does your child feel about school?
- Is there something about your child that might not be obvious to the teacher or principal, but might positively or negatively affect his/her performance in school? If so, please explain.
- What kinds of things do you do to help your child be successful in school?

Although Edwards and her colleagues suggested a more formal interview approach for collecting parent stories, administrators like Mr. Carter can gather this valuable information from informal conversations. As Mr. Carter listened to parents and their stories, he gained insights about their hardships and their lives.

> I don't have what is perceived as the "typical welfare family," parents sitting home getting drunk all day and sending their kids to school and they're just no-count, no-good. I've got a lot of parents who are struggling to get by working two or three jobs, they even pool their households to combine trying to pay the rent and put enough food on the table. So when I try to reach them and they're not there, it's not because they're at the bar or they're drunk somewhere; they're working. And, when I do get hold of them and reach them, they're exhausted. So I have to be aware of that. But I can also look past that and see the humanness in them, and they begin to see the

humanness in me. And we end up with a situation where we can have a good dialogue about what needs to happen, and it's not about blaming somebody.

Clearly, parent stories have given Mr. Carter a different perspective about students, families, and communities. By moving beyond the at-risk label typically designated to low-income and minority parents, Mr. Carter fostered the human side of education, one that emphasizes open communication and collaboration between home and school (Edwards et al., 1999). In doing so, Mr. Carter invited these parents into the school by positioning them as "the more knowledgeable others" in terms of their expertise about culturally diverse home literacy environments and practices.

Consequently, parent stories provided critical information about families and communities that transformed the school's literacy curriculum and instruction. Mr. Carter shared this information with teachers to challenge their negative perceptions of parents as "disadvantaged" or "deficit." Parent stories increased teachers' awareness of and respect for the intangible forms of parent involvement and cultural practices, such as creating a supportive home environment, holding high expectations for their children, and making personal sacrifices to help them (Nieto, 1996). Mr. Carter explained as follows:

> Teachers are gonna have opinions . . . and thoughts about how "those kids are." I want them to be able to say, "Look, everybody has a fresh start here." I show them it's important for them to look at the person, let all those bad thoughts go, and understand this person is human just like they are. . . . Then, it's not so important to tell parents how bad they are or what they've done with their kids is bad. It becomes a matter of helping parents to help their son or daughter become successful.

Using parent stories, Mr. Carter also had a strategy for helping teachers to connect literacy instruction with the home-based literacy experiences and cultural practices in meaningful and significant ways. While many teachers and school administrators pay lip service to having a child-centered literacy curriculum and pedagogy, very few have understood how to accomplish this goal. Parent stories provided the mechanism for Mr. Carter and his faculty to respond to the needs of culturally diverse students and parents. The idea that urban families have their own cultural capital in educating their children is important, and it is imperative that teachers build upon these literacy foundations in an effort to maximize literacy achievement (Reglin, 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Important insights and conclusions

We have shared the Williams and Carter stories as a testimonial to the urban principal. Like other administrators working in urban schools around the country, these two men have witnessed the devastation of the community and its effects upon the lives of students and their families. However, Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter have made important inroads to working with and understanding their students and their families. Both stories highlight the caring, the compassion, and the dedication that these two principals had for serving urban families, who are often considered to be America's "throwaway" population (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Their success in working with parents shows that it is possible for educators to build positive relationships with families and their communities. The lesson learned from both stories is that teachers and administrators must have a strong commitment to giving the maximum so that all children have a chance to learn and to succeed.

More important, the Williams and Carter stories exemplified the changing nature of the urban principalship. Urban principals can no longer narrowly prescribe their role as organizational managers and focus their attention upon administrative duties. In order for urban schools to be effective, today's principals must also serve as strong instructional leaders. This type of leadership emphasizes culture building, in terms of fostering a mentally healthy school environment that empowers teachers, students, and parents. In effect, teachers and administrators who listen to parents invite them to share personal knowledge about their home literacy environment and cultural practices in ways that foster home-school collaborations (Edwards et al., 1999). Further, urban principals and teachers can transform literacy curriculum and instruction by drawing upon these rich sources of information (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

We believe, as Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter do, that the first step to effective teaching in urban elementary schools is making a personal investment in students, families, and the community. Challenging the negative perceptions and stereo-

types about urban families and communities is central to providing literacy instruction that is appropriate and responsive to the needs of culturally diverse students (Edwards et al., 1999). Similarly, Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) asserted that

> If we are to teach, we must first examine our own assumptions about families and children and we must be alert to the negative images in the literature. . . . Instead of responding to "pathologies," we must recognize that what we see may actually be healthy adaptations to an uncertain and stressful world. As teachers, researchers, and policymakers, we need to think about the children themselves and try to imagine the contextual worlds of their day-to-day lives. (p. 203)

Both Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter empathized with the families because they were acutely aware of the hard times in the surrounding community. Neither principal blamed families for their problems because many of them were cognizant of the mental health issues in society. However, these urban principals took the initiative to introduce parents to some of the nuances of school-based discourse. By inviting parents to come to visit their children's classrooms, creating a positive learning environment that welcomed parents, and interacting with parents in respectful ways, Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter empowered families to take more active roles in their children's academic lives.

We feel that it is imperative that urban principals take the next step and use home-school connections in ways that specifically foster students' literacy development. Children come to school with a wealth of literacy knowledge from their homes, and it is important for teachers and administrators to build upon those early learning experiences (Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Edwards & Pleasants, 1997). Urban principals like Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter help to build partnerships between school and home. These partnerships can serve as a foundation for urban principals and teachers to collect "parent stories," which provide specific information about the traditional and nontraditional early literacy activities within the home (Edwards et al., 1999). With these parent stories, teachers and administrators have the unique opportunity to gain vital information about students' familial and cultural literacies that can be used to inform curriculum and instruction.

We conclude our article with an insightful comment from Mr. Williams that serves as a reminder to urban educators about the important roles they play in the lives of their students and families:

> Other than drugs, school is the biggest influence on this community. The school is the only hope they have. . . . That's why I became a principal, so I could have a positive impact on my kids and their families. I like my job. I get to work with great kids who are really, really smart. . . and I can make these kids winners.

We believe urban administrators and teachers can make a positive impact in the lives of culturally diverse children, families, and communities. By understanding how social, economic, linguistic, and cultural factors mediate schooling, urban principals and teachers can develop more student-centered approaches to literacy curriculum and instruction. In doing so, urban teachers can connect to students' individual learning styles and build upon their prior knowledge and experiences. Like Mr. Williams and Mr. Carter, we acknowledge that for this kind of teaching urban educators must make a transition from business as usual toward a new vision of education that unites administrators, teachers, parents, and communities in ways that enhance the literacy development and academic achievement of urban children.

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The authors wish to acknowledge the support of the research reported here from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, administered by the Office of Educational Research Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, and from the Spencer Foundation Small Grant Program.

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BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Robert J. Nistler
Angela Maiers

Stopping the silence: Hearing parents' voices in an urban first-grade family literacy program

If you want to see an improvement in the literacy development of children in your classroom, try a parental involvement program like this one.

Russo and Cooper (1999) pointed to the beginnings of a parent revolution in urban schools, an end to "disorganization and near silence" (p. 140). They cited evidence demonstrating that the family is no longer the silent partner in urban schools in the U.S. They suggest that recent polls and actions indicate a movement toward greater involvement and voice on the part of parents with children in urban schools. The following report of a family literacy program is an example of how parents, long silenced by inability to successfully negotiate the public school system, can establish themselves as valued partners with teachers in the literacy development of their children at home and in school.

Research studies of early readers and investigations of emergent literacy uniformly conclude that parental beliefs, aspirations, and actions critically affect children's literacy growth (Routman, 1996). We (a university professor and a first-grade teacher) established a joint home-school family literacy program to help parents understand how important their role is in their child's literacy growth. We sought to help parents appreciate that they do have important skills to share, but we also wished to empower them with additional skills that would enhance their understanding of literacy development and provide the confidence and support necessary to contribute to their children's literacy development. We believed that it was crucial for the families with whom we interacted to understand (a) that their children's literacy development can be fostered, (b) that this development must be valued in all homes, and (c) that it should be viewed as a *shared* responsibility between home and school.

We built our program on our beliefs that parents are a powerful, underused source of knowledge—a great untapped resource in many schools. Families can provide teachers with a vast reservoir of talent, energy, and insight. Instead, parents often can be made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome within the school environment; parent insights may be dismissed as unimportant. However, it is just such insight that is needed for informed classroom instruction. Rather than viewing the school and home as separate and distinct, we must honor our common goal to help children become successful learners.

Our stance toward the value of home-school connections is consistent with Morrow's (1995) call for studies of family literacy that take a variety of perspectives in order to gain knowledge not only from professionals in the field but from the families and children as well. Elish-Piper (1997) noted that too often family literacy programs do not fully explore or value diverse family backgrounds. This report of our program addresses what occurs when parents and children engage in literate activities *during* the school day with emphasis on combining the

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strengths of home literacy with school. Information shared from our experiences can provide valuable information to educators to help continue or initiate strong literacy development in children. In addition, it points to the value of regular interactions with parents to better understand their beliefs, attitudes, daily challenges, and perceptions of the roles they play in the literacy development of their children.

The program described in this article represents what Neuman, Caperelli, and Kee (1998) described as "small wins." Drawing from Benjamin and Lord, 1996, and Connors, 1994, Neuman et al. stated,

> In contrast to a "big bang" effect—the belief that the debilitating effects of illiteracy will be eradicated—gains in family literacy can more aptly be described as "short stacks of small wins" which serve as indicators of improvements that produce visible results. (p. 251)

They concluded that "Richly detailed qualitative analyses may ultimately provide the most tangible, personal, and powerful means of demonstrating the effects of family literacy programs as well as the processes and dynamics of instruction that contribute to them" (p. 251).

Program setting

This article focuses on two different cohorts of families of Angela Maiers's first-grade students across 2 academic years. As an intact classroom unit, the students had been randomly assigned to her classroom, and they represented the general first-grade population at their school. This classroom is in an urban elementary school that follows a modified calendar as a type of year-round schedule. The school serves approximately 470 students and 300 families in the inner city of Des Moines, Iowa, USA. In general, class size in this classroom averaged 15 students. During the first year of this study, the mobility rate at this school was 85% (229 exits and 298 entries). Within Angela's classroom during the second year, 6 students were there for the duration. Beyond those, 30 other students entered or departed during the course of the school year. Enrollment of the more mobile students ranged from 1 week to 6 months.

A predominance of children in the school qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, resulting in the district providing free meals for all. Of the adult residents in the area from which the school draws its students, 38% have no high school diploma or GED (General Equivalency Diploma). Of the mothers, 33% have less than a high school diploma. According to the state definition, 102 children in the school were considered "homeless" at some time during the first year of this program. Teachers report that a number of parents have difficulty providing basic necessities, such as hats, gloves, warm coats, shoes, and school supplies. Many have had past negative school experiences and are so focused on basic necessities that it becomes difficult for them to meet their children's educational needs.

Within this elementary school environment, it was unknown what literacy experiences children might have had prior to school. Lack of consistent in-depth parent-teacher interactions limited opportunities for learning about literacy activities in the home. What was known was that entering first graders in this urban school lacked the early literacy experiences requisite for future success in the school setting. As educators, we recognize the importance of understanding home literacy experiences and parents' roles in their children's school experiences. We recognize that values placed on literacy, and not on social status, race, or economics, are what make for a home rich in literacy (Morrow, 1995). However, research also points out that the types and forms of literacy practiced in homes can be incongruent with what children encounter in school (Auerbach, 1989). Long-term studies by Au (1981) and Heath (1983), and more recently by Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999) and McCarthey (1997), provided detailed accounts of children and families struggling to reconcile the familiar sociocultural patterns of functioning in their homes and communities with the vastly different and often confusing environment of the public school. Collectively, these studies, as well as others not cited, elaborated on the conflicting nature of school and community incongruencies that Auerbach identified. Further, these studies provided clear direction for improved social and academic classroom environments.

Description of the program

Although this program was initiated by the first-grade teacher, Angela, she had very strong feelings about shared ownership between parents and teacher. In her words,

My intention was not to adopt a school model of literacy, but rather to provide an exchange between home and school to support students' literacy growth. As weeks passed, "my" classroom quickly became "ours." We became a community of learners. The atmosphere was that of cooperation. There was an ambiance of learning with a fine balance of stimulation and nurturing.

During our sessions, families identified problems, shared resources, became supports for one another, and a commitment to family literacy developed. The traditional parent-teacher relationship was turned upside down as parents welcomed me into their world. Emotions shared were honest, strong, and sincere. This project was born out of genuine respect for the parents' role as their child's first and primary educator. From the beginning, they were equal partners in the endeavor. I found they embraced the responsibility, accountability, and freedom of having a voice. When I met with parents, it was important that they knew that it was their program. Decisions were jointly made, from our meeting times and dates to the types of activities planned. Communication was varied and continuous. I learned to listen more and talk less.

With a 1-month break when school was not in session during fall and spring semesters and a 2-week winter holiday break, 13 sessions and a final picnic were held during the first year, and 15 sessions were held during the second. Parents of children in the first-grade classroom were invited to join their child for directed and informal literacy and related social activities. Parents or others representing students' families visited school from 8:45 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. on designated Fridays. During these times, adult-student pairs were guided through early literacy instructional activities. Angela consistently modeled literacy behaviors that could be repeated and extended at home.

Activities began with normal daily routines including a teacher-generated written message to parents and children (morning message), song, pledge, and sharing. A Poem of the Week consisting of four lines of words, word families, and language familiar to students was read from large chart paper. Participants then broke into four student/parent member cooperative groups where they received a copy of the poem. The poem was also printed on standard sentence strips, and students were guided by parents as they sequenced the strips. After reconstructing the text of the poem, students cut up the sentence strips into individual words. Students then reconstructed the poem. As a final step, students received a printed version of the poem, which they glued and illustrated in their own Poem Book. Poems were later used for familiar rereading and silent reading time by parents and children.

Following the cooperative poem groups, the teacher or a parent/student pair led the group through reading and singing an alphabet song, based upon a poem that focused on specific letter sounds. Food preparation activities were next. These were designed to be simple and provided opportunities for the teacher to model reading the recipe; point out key words; and help adults and students measure, pour, and stir ingredients. Attention was drawn to recognition of numbers and words from the recipes, vocabulary related to cooking, and observations of how ingredients change when they are combined. Children also worked with basic math concepts such as counting, measurement, and part-whole relationships.

Next, families moved to the literacy stations that were always available in the classroom. They participated in a variety of literacy and math activities at these centers, which provided interactive and nonthreatening ways for parents to interact with their child and understand skills and concepts reinforced in the classroom. Sample stations included Dramatic Play Area, Computer, Exploration/Science Theme of Magnets, Tool and Building Station, Math Manipulative Station, Piano and Music Station, Reading Corner, and Publishing and Art Center. As families became accustomed to the routine and make-up of the workstations, they began to contribute ideas and materials to modify them.

In addition to the scheduled activities, the teacher met with individual adults during this time and throughout the week to discuss concerns regarding students' literacy development, and how to promote it, as well as other pertinent family issues (e.g., health, housing, instructional materials, transportation, child care, employment). During year one, a 1-hour teacher/parents seminar to discuss such concerns was held after parents and children worked together. During year two, this activity was woven into the morning activities. Angela shared her rationale for this changed approach in the following journal entry.

I'd like to discuss my reasoning behind changing the schedule. Last year's program had four very distinct blocks. The cooking project, poem groups, the center time, and the parent seminar component (a very vital component for last year). The parents

that belonged in the group last year really needed that kind of support and kind of encouragement between themselves and from me. There were several things that were going on that bonded the parents together like a death of a student and a very seriously ill student. Many of the parents had concerns with housing, and it was a very close and consistent group for attendance. They looked forward to coming each week.

This year there were several factors why that component is not working. It is not that it [the parent group] is not important, I just think that it is being done differently this year. We have quite a different group, and the needs of parents are different. There isn't a closeness of parents this year due to the high mobility rate of my classroom. The parents are working more than the parents last year, so we have several different representations (surrogates) from families. We have cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends representing students, which is valuable. The family thinks the program is valuable enough that a parent [or adult] comes, but we see a lot of different people coming. There is not a cohesive group coming to the program; there is no core group. So, what I have been doing in place of the parent group time is to go to the different groups at the centers and talk to the parents about what they can do at home with their children, so I still get that focused teaching moment, only it is happening on an individual basis versus a group basis.

Methods used for program evaluation

This family literacy program began inauspiciously as described by Angela (Maiers & Nistler, 1998).

> This program began in my head when the parent coordinator asked me to "pilot" a program that involved more than the standard two-parent activities and conference required...each year. We felt that if parents came to school on a regular basis that they would want to participate in more school activities.
>
> I'm sure they [parents] all thought I was crazy that *very* warm day in July when I, their child's first-grade teacher, showed up at their doorstep with a colored box of "stuff." I had no idea what I was getting into and no idea where this road would take me. (p. 223)

Because of the evolving nature of this program, it was critical that Angela develop consistent means for documenting all that occurred in order to inform program development. From the outset, Angela kept a personal journal in which she shared her observations and reflections related to this program and its participants. In addition, she interviewed a family representative for each student at the beginning, midterm, and end of the academic year. Audiotapes of these interviews were transcribed so we could better use this information to learn about our program and our families. The interview information was helpful but inconsistent for families who moved away from school with little or no advance notice to allow for an exit interview. Our semi-structured interview guide is included in the Sidebar.

Information collected by Angela was augmented by my field notes chronicling what I observed during my visits to Friday sessions. During year two of the program, an undergraduate education student joined me in observing and writing down her observations of the Friday sessions. Angela and I, joined by undergraduate student Abby Sims in year two, discussed our observations, impressions, concerns, and suggestions for change nearly every week of the program. These discussions occurred by phone, in triads, or meetings between two of us, and they became an important way to make sense of

Interview guide

1. What activities do you find most enjoyable when you come to school?
2. How often are you able to read with your child at home?
3. Have you done anything new or different this year with literacy at home?
4. How often are you able to visit the library with your child?
5. What is your biggest barrier to attending school activities?
   - job conflicts
   - time
   - transportation
   - baby-sitting
   - interest
   - other
6. How do you plan to continue being involved in school activities?
7. Do you feel informed about activities that occur at school?
8. Which of the following do you find most informative about what is happening at school?
   - classroom newsletter
   - parent message board
   - phone calls
   - notes home
   - school newsletters
   - schoolwide notes
   - personal notes to yourself
   - personal notes to your child
   - personal contact
   - other
9. General comments:

our experiences in this program. So much was happening that it became very important for each of us to have this outlet to share with the others.

Equally important, parents helped us know what to do differently, what worked, and what was needed. Angela was always meeting with parents either at school, outside school, or on the phone to gather feedback about their children and this program.

Levels of involvement

This program created a structure for involving parents and children in the children's development as readers and writers at school with the hope this would transfer to home practices as well. Families' involvement in this program was uniformly high when viewed in terms of (a) attendance, (b) interactions with others in the classroom community, and (c) participation in literacy activities in school and at home.

Attendance. During year one 96.5% of the students enrolled in Angela's classroom were represented at Friday sessions. During year two 94.5% of her students were represented at program sessions in which she was in the classroom (maternity leave notwithstanding). It should be noted that in year two, 6 of the 14 students enrolled in August were still enrolled at the end of the program. Attrition of families throughout the year was due to their leaving this school rather than a decision not to participate. Turnover of students was prevalent there. As the teacher noted,

> My class list has changed by eight students already only 4 weeks into school. One day I got three new students in less than a 2-hour block. Four of the home visits that I did were no-shows at the beginning of school. There is a possibility of losing three families again over the next couple of weeks. This is life at this school.

Whether physically attending program sessions or not, families of students demonstrated involvement by attending, sending a substitute family member, calling to report absences, or sending supplies to support the morning activities. For example, an early entry in Angela's journal during year two demonstrates the use of family surrogates. (Pseudonyms are used for all students and parents.)

> Grandma came to the first Friday group. From the start she kept telling me she could only stay 15 or 20 minutes. She said this about three or four times and ended up getting really involved in the book boxes and stayed the entire session!

Other entries from Angela's journal demonstrate parental efforts and good intentions to attend and be involved.

> During the first session Lisa was only going to stay a short time because she had worked all night and still came to group without sleep! She stayed almost the entire time! She really interacted well with her daughter.
>
> Tasha's mom stopped in to visit this morning. Tasha's aunt told her how much fun Friday was, and Tasha was disappointed she couldn't come. She is working out a new schedule at work and wants to really try to make it next Friday. She said if not, she would definitely be in on another day to work with her daughter. I got her working with the school success worker to deal with some family issues with housing and her marriage. She has kept all her meetings, and I think it is going well.
>
> Both mom and dad attended and stayed the entire time! They both commented to me personally about how well they felt the morning went and how glad they were they came. Both work outside construction type jobs, and I know scheduling time will be a large barrier to their attendance.

To create and sustain involvement, recruitment needed to be innovative and persistent. To achieve successful participation, it was important for Angela to acknowledge and remove potential barriers that would affect attendance. Obstacles can be either physical or psychological. Parents repeatedly commented on how family circumstances, job issues, or other such obstacles were possible factors for not being involved. Yet, not one family in this program indicated they did not want to be there for their child.

Reducing physical barriers such as transportation and child care was foremost on Angela's agenda. Baby-sitting was offered to parents, and rides were given when needed. These services were offered, but as the parents formed a closer-knit community they began to negotiate and share resources to confront these barriers. As parents grew closer to one another, rides were shared and traded, and families began to bring younger siblings to school for the morning activities. Angela had established an atmosphere that was family friendly and conducive to visitors. Families were comfortable bringing younger siblings and infants. It was not unusual to see Angela pick up the classroom telephone and hear her respond to an absent parent, "Get over here now and bring that baby with

you!" Many parents commented on how they appreciated being able to participate at school with *all* their children.

Emotional barriers affecting attendance were addressed on a different level from those of a physical nature. Negotiating emotions such as fear of school, low self-esteem, and cultural and familial differences were more subtle and difficult to eliminate. With time spent together at school, under Angela's constant encouragement, family members began to feel more comfortable and confident in the school environment. Near the end of year two, Abby noted the following observation.

> It's 10:10 a.m. Angela hugs three moms as they leave. She's at the front door. [Parents line up like first graders would on their way out the door.] "It means so much to your kids that you're here," she tells them as they leave.

Interactions with others in the classroom community. The promise of helping their child succeed in school may be the initial reason parents became involved in the program, but classroom observations suggest that this interest, combined with a feeling of personal success and accomplishment, promoted continued participation. Friendships were built as parents and teacher learned from one another. The formal and informal parent/teacher interactions gave parents the opportunity to talk about community issues and personal experiences and to express their thoughts and opinions in a nonthreatening and caring environment, as is apparent in the following parent's note to Angela.

> Thank you for all your extra support. I had my daughter when I was 16 years old, so it's nice to have advice from other mothers that are more educated. Sometimes I want to just give up, but I can't—I went through that with my mother. She left me when I was 5, and I never found her 'til I was 12 years old. With the way things are now, at home, it's been really hard. I am open to any options to help with my daughter. Thanks so much.

This program also gave parents the opportunity to learn about their child's school and classroom, and it gave the teacher a chance to learn about the families involved. As one parent offered, "This is a great program. It is fun to see how the classroom works and get to know the other parents and students. We look forward to coming. It is like a family time." Angela was brought into the world of her students and became an equal partner working with families on the shared goal of helping children in this inner-city school develop and grow. These efforts on the part of the adults in their lives were not lost on the students, as the following written statement by a first grader indicates.

> Every Friday my class cooks together. My mom comes and cooks with us. I feel so excited and happy and glad. I sit by my mom, and my mom sits by me. I cook by my mom and my mom cooks by me. We have lots of fun together. I love Fridays.

Abby captured the essence of classroom interactions for students and families when she shared the following observations early in year two of the program.

> Watching 14 eager faces on Friday mornings as they watch for their parents or grandparents to arrive is a sight in itself. Children experience coloring, reading, cutting, pasting, and cooking with their parents, all of which promote literacy. . . . I see such great things coming from this program. I see an opportunity for parents to get involved in their first grader's life in a way that he or she may never be a part of for the rest of their student's schooling. I also see the effort and care children put into their time with their families, and the pride they take in showing them what they have achieved with Angela. The students feel valued—important. But most of all, they feel like they are a part of something special. They are a part of a singular program that allows who they most value, their parents and family, to be a part of something that is uniquely theirs. Mrs. Maiers's first-grade class

Participation in literacy activities at home and school. A primary intent of this program was to model behaviors that support literacy at home. Parents were encouraged to use literacy in many ways with their children, including reading, writing, composing letters, journal keeping, and cooking. Adults were also encouraged to engage in these literacy behaviors at home. Parental comments regarding the carryover of school literacy activities to the home indicate that they engaged in activities introduced, modeled, and practiced during the biweekly Friday sessions.

> I have sentences at home that I have him write, like from the reading groups [at school].

> I make sentences and Jason helps me put them together, then he writes the sentence just like we do in group.

> We've done cut-outs at home [poem group activity].

Parents wanted to help their children succeed in school, but often requested help and

guidance about how to do this most effectively. With time in the program, parents' confidence in the value of their interactions with their children increased, as did confidence in their reading ability and their own capacity to help their children with school activities. This was evident as parents assumed greater responsibility for conducting classroom literacy activities. Abby briefly describes one such occurrence.

> Karen's mom was actively engaged in the text as she read it to the class, laughing just as much as they did. She literally had children hanging off her by the end of the story. Students were too absorbed in her reading the book to notice incoming parents and phone calls.

Through participation in the program, parents learned what was expected of their children at school, and they became more aware of what their children were capable of doing with support. Sometimes that support came in the form of carving out individual space at home for a student's school-based belongings.

> We try to help with her homework more. She keeps everything in her box that her and James (father) made [personal storage box for reading materials at home created at first session]. She has a lot of books and papers there.

For others, support was provided as parents modified existing home literacy practices according to what they observed and learned during school-based activities.

> As far as reading, before I used to just read to the kids. Now they sit on my lap, and we point to the words and read a lot more together, and it's to the point now that he'll come to me and say, "You know, it's time for reading." I mean he's actually excited about doing some school stuff now where he wasn't before.
>
> The cooking and singing [in class] is so great. I hate to sing, but I am singing right along with the kids! There is so much learning when we are cooking. My son wants to cook every Saturday. We make it a special thing. He loves making deviled eggs. I'll get the class the recipe.

Elements for program success

Neuman et al. (1998) reviewed the files of all the grants that have been funded (52) by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Analysis of these programs identified successful features of family literacy programs. While not all-inclusive of the body of work available regarding family literacy, these grants do represent the breadth of programs that exist in the field of family literacy. The program features that we identify as critical to the success of our family literacy program are certainly in keeping with the aforementioned findings. We discuss those features next.

Create a sense of community. Kambrelis (1995) and Lewis (1995) viewed "community" from a performance perspective in which norms and expectations evolve through negotiation among participants. Lewis stated that

> [C]ontexts (including classrooms) are not static social facts or representations but construction zones or performative inventions negotiated by the participants. As such, they are heterogeneous and negotiable. This is crucial because it is within these construction zones that socialization and learning occur and individuals claim particular kinds of social and cultural practices and identities. (p. 150)

Angela's classroom became the type of construction zone alluded to by Kambrelis and Lewis. Parents were interested in supporting their child's literacy learning and in turn felt successes in their own development. Parents talked of the bonds they formed with fellow parents, what they learned from one another, and what Angela learned from them. Individually, Angela talked with parents; they in turn discussed with one another community issues, personal experiences, and other concerns. Every member had something significant to contribute. Families were a rich source of information, both for understanding individual children and for general planning.

Initially, families went individually to Angela to discuss how to address critical needs they had either at home or with their children in school. Over time, families turned to one another for support and information rather than solely relying on Angela.

Role of teacher. The role of the teacher in this program proved vital. Parents raved about the positive relationship that they had with Angela and that she had with the students. Research suggests that, in general, a teacher's interpersonal skills and professional merit have a significant effect on parental perceptions and willingness to participate (Epstein, 1988). Angela works well with students and adults in a unique manner. However, as we viewed the nature of her interactions we identified elements of them that others can apply in similar programs.

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Angela consciously employed a great variety of strategies to ensure that all families believed they were among supportive friends in the classroom community. Simple gestures such as acknowledging all who entered and left the classroom, capturing special family times in the classroom with pictures and distributing these, and providing lists of safety measures for cooking with children established a genuine sense of teacher concern for family members. In addition to these efforts, the individual and group discussions (with Angela and parents as equal participants) contributed to the depth of relationships that were valuable to this program's success.

During a parent discussion group early in the program, Angela asked for advice from those around her. "Since all of you have made it through the terrible 2s with your children, I'd appreciate any advice you could give me for my 2-year-old!" Parents immediately began to share and discuss what it is like having a 2-year-old. This provided an opportunity for parents to share something with Angela rather than feeling that she was always trying to help them. A deeper relationship was beginning as parents shared with one another and with Angela their thoughts, feelings, and most of all their trust.

Further evidence of the nature of the teacher's role in our program was provided when a long-term substitute teacher took over during Angela's 8-week maternity leave at midyear of the second year. In her written observations, Abby noted how Angela and the long-term sub differed in their interactions with families.

> What a difference between Angela's interaction and the substitute teacher. Seeing this for the first time today I made a few observations. First, there was very little personal contact made between the teacher and the students. The entire morning was led with very little parent to parent, student to parent, or teacher to parent interaction. Parents mostly sat at a distance from the group, unless taking disciplinary actions, and were minimally involved with the morning's activities. Today exemplified how crucial it is that the teacher have an ongoing relationship with the parents, continually inviting them into the classroom.
>
> The teacher's instructional role was very different as well. Today the teacher was more authoritative than interactive with the students. Although the activities called for the teacher to participate in the activities with the students, there were more disciplinary measures being taken than in previous sessions.

When Angela returned as the regular classroom teacher in February, Abby again noted important differences between the sub and Angela's roles.

> I knew that today would "work." Why? Because of two factors: One, Angela recruited incessantly for today's program. She contacted each child's parent, letting them know that *this program is important*. Secondly, the *parents trust Angela*. She is by no means a stranger to them, actively working them into their children's academic lives. Knowing these two things beforehand gave me all the confidence I needed to trust that today's program would soar. And soar it did.

Abby made other observations indicating how the environment changed with Angela's return to the classroom.

> Students and parents were sitting in a close-knit group early on in the morning, something that has been lacking in the last two or three sessions. Reviewing the text was thorough. The recipe and directions were initially read and then reread—an important modeling aspect of this program.

Finally, it should be noted that in Angela's absence most families quit attending. Only a core group of three parents maintained involvement.

Maintain efforts for ongoing and varied communication. A variety of methods were necessary for communicating with all the families in our program. Most parents talked about the positive influence of personal (face-to-face) contacts throughout the week (not only on Fridays) for exchanging a wide range of information. Phone calls were another area of communication that parents appreciated. Calls were used to notify parents of concerns, but conveyed positive messages as well. Rich contacts also occurred during home visits, which helped demonstrate Angela's strong interest in students and families. Over the course of this program, carving out meaningful dialogue took time and patience on the part of the classroom teacher and family representatives, but this investment ultimately contributed to open, trusting relationships.

Consistent recruitment. Recruitment for participation must be ongoing. Home visits were made before the program began, but due to the mobility rate of the population, recruiting needed to be continuous. Early in the week that a Friday session was scheduled, Angela would send home written fliers reminding parents to participate. In addition, she would list the item or items the family had volunteered to bring for the

morning's activities. Most important, Angela would include an envelope containing pictures of each family's participation in the previous session. Finally, as Friday neared Angela would follow up the notes with phone calls to determine each family's intentions to attend.

Participation increased as parents interacted with one another during the sessions and as the word spread among families—and through children's requests for parental involvement as they saw more and more families represented. Yet developing a stable attendance rate takes time. It took several months for families to understand what the program entailed and for other families to join after the initial recruitment. When Angela was absent for 8 weeks (four sessions) in December and January of the second year, attendance dwindled and positive engagement in literacy learning activities in the classroom sessions diminished considerably. Average adult attendance during sessions with Angela was 10; this number decreased to 3 when she was out on leave.

Share program responsibilities with parents. Late in year two of our program, Abby recorded discussing with Angela the delicate balance that existed between parent and teacher responsibilities.

> "This is their program, not my program. I may be the facilitator, but it's *their* program. They would not be here if it was just me disseminating information." Later, when Angela and I discussed this last comment, we noted that although Angela acts as the facilitator, it must be *appropriate* facilitation. As we know, without the appropriate guidance, the program is unsuccessful and falls apart. The program is at a point now where the parents feel they are in charge and running the program. It's a fine line. It's like a developmentally appropriate classroom—when does the teacher act as the observer and when must (s)he intervene? Angela guides the group, yet the group acts as a family working together throughout the morning.

There were numerous occasions where observations such as the following demonstrated parents' willingness to do the "work" of the morning.

> Jack's dad was jovial and comfortable. He's at a point where he needs very little direction from Angela to "take kids under his wing." He's at a point where he just does it.

To encourage parental involvement Angela made sure that parents were aware of the value of their input, as was the case when she met with a student's mother to plan how to modify her son's behavior in the classroom. Abby noted the following:

> When Angela asked Terrence's mom what advice she might have to help modify Terrence's behavior, Angela sent two messages to Terrence's mom. First, Angela is concerned about Terrence, and secondly, that Angela respects and wants the mom's help.

Engage participants in a variety of literacy activities. Parents and caregivers engaged in a wide variety of literacy activities with their children. Storybook reading was an integral part of our program. Parents were given access to quality books and also given time to observe and practice interactive storybook reading. Although shared storybook reading has been identified as the most important activity in preparing children for school success, homes where children do not engage in this are not devoid of literacy. As reported by Morrow (1995) and others, families use literacy in many different ways. It was important that families felt these ways were affirmed and valued. The variety of classroom activities parents were exposed to, such as cooking and the many different learning centers, helped parents to see just how much they were contributing to their children's literacy development during their everyday home activities. This proved to be just as important as introducing new uses of literacy.

Teacher understanding of family challenges. The types of literacy activities that parents and caregivers choose are largely dictated by the circumstances in their lives (Paratore, 1995). Despite extensive discussion and modeling, parents still found it difficult to find time to read and write with their children. As reported by parents, outside circumstances and issues played a significant role in whether or not literacy activities occurred at home. Social issues, such as the following incident reported in Angela's journal, indicate the extreme challenges faced in some families.

> Robert's mom stole the grandmother's car and money and took off. She has been gone almost 1 week. She left the kids with grandma, but she is in bad health and has no money to raise them. She sent them to live with relatives in Missouri. This is very upsetting.

Whenever possible, Angela worked with parents to find appropriate social services to deal with the events in their lives.

It was all worth the effort

Parents exhibited strong values to help their child succeed, reinforcing the belief that where literacy is valued it is nurtured. One criticism of many programs designed for parents, especially low-income African American parents, is that they "won't come because they are simply not interested in helping their children" (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). We found this to be absolutely untrue. Morrow (1995) noted that even parents who lack knowledge about the school program do not lack interest in their child's school, or learning how to help their children at home. The common thread with all the families we worked with was that they genuinely cared about their children's education.

Never was this more in evidence than in the following incident. Angela was teaching a graduate course on family literacy and parental involvement. She had gathered a panel of "parent experts" to share their opinions regarding parental involvement in children's literacy development. The panel consisted of parents who had participated in our family literacy program with their children. As parents began to address her students Angela's thoughts turned to her initial encounter with Jack and his father, David. She later noted the following in her journal.

> As David sat there today so proud, so confident and strong, my mind drifted back to that summer day in July as I visited his apartment trying to convince a seemingly unconvincible [sic] parent about the benefits of parent involvement. On July 16, 1996, I had made the following entry in my family literacy journal.
>
> Today I visited four families, but it was the last visit of the day that has stayed with me. I met David and his son Jack. They live in a one-bedroom apartment with David's cousin until they can find a place of their own. He had recently moved and has found work with a local construction company. David is raising his son alone. Jack's mother is in jail.
>
> I introduced myself to Jack, and told him that I was going to be his teacher for the coming year. I shared with David some of my hopes for a new program I was implementing in my first-grade classroom involving parents in a new way. He stood there and looked at me with his arms tightly crossed and said in a matter-of-fact way that he would not be participating in any program. He explained his busy schedule with work and the responsibilities he faces as a single father. He allowed me to continue with details of what I proposed. He politely listened, but there was an invisible wall between us. His guard was up, and he seemed so unresponsive to what I had to say. I continued trying to get him excited about working together, but in the back of my mind I knew that for many possible reasons he may not come. I asked him to meet me at school any time the first week so that I could help Jack make a smooth transition at his new school.
>
> In the short time I was there, David shared with me that his experience in Jack's previous school was frustrating and upsetting to both of them. I wanted so badly for this year to be different. I thanked them for their time and told them that I looked forward to our next meeting. There was no answer as to whether or not he would be meeting me at school to discuss the program farther. I left an open invitation and did not push the issue. The entire time we talked he kept looking to Jack, referring to him. His love and commitment to his son was evident. Our first meeting is in 1 week. I will wait and see.

Angela's thoughts returned to her class discussion, which she also noted in her journal.

> October 28, 1998
>
> David sat before the group of graduate education students one of a panel of parents addressing "Creating family-school partnerships." I had asked David to be a guest on the panel, and it took all I had to keep my composure when he talked. I was beaming with pride in awe of how much he had grown in the time we had worked together. He did come that first day for our first meeting and from that point he never stopped being involved. Now, he is sharing his story with others. He points his finger to the audience of graduate students seated eagerly to hear from parents their thoughts and insights about parent involvement.
>
> He begins, "You teachers, parent involvement is the most important thing you can do in our classrooms. It is everything. She got me to come, and you have to get your parents there, too. My parents weren't involved. I was abused. They were not there for me, but I am there for him."
>
> If those powerful words were not enough for my students to hear, across the room sat his son Jack, looking at his father with great admiration and respect. Their eyes were locked on one another. The room went silent as David became emotional. David apologized to the group for breaking down. He paused and continued. "I want to see him graduate. I didn't graduate. My boy (his eyes are filled with tears), he is the most important thing in the world."
>
> I wanted so badly to race up there and give him a hug, but I had to continue the facilitation of the panel. Another parent reached over and gently patted David on the back for support. I commented with a heartfelt "Thank you for sharing." Inside I was bursting. He has given so much to make Jack's life better than his own. My admiration and respect for him is immense. He thanked the panel and myself for giving him the opportunity to share his insights. He repeated several times how important and special it made him feel to be a part of this group and to help teachers work more successfully with the parents in their classrooms. It was me who should be thanking him. My class listened to his words and saw the love in his eyes as he looked at his son.
>
> When he left that day, he told me that he had lost his job, and they were moving on again to find work and a place to

live. He had already made plans to go and meet with Jack's new teacher. Won't she be the lucky one. He hugged me and thanked me for all that I had done for him and his son. I gave him my address and asked him to send me an invitation to Jack's graduation. I will wait and expect a special piece of mail in 10 years or so. This will be a day that I will never forget. It made all the extra time and effort worth every minute and more. Thank you, David, for all that you have taught me about being a teacher, parent, and friend. Although I cannot re-create that special day, this journal entry illustrates the powerful and lasting impact working closely with parents can have on students, teachers, and children. It is a small window into understanding the vital role families play in the education of their children.

Interest in and a commitment to family literacy continues to grow. Parental involvement programs such as this one are designed to work with parents for the primary purpose of improving their child's literacy development (Epstein, 1988; Swap, 1993). This article describes what can occur when parents and children engage in literate activities *during* the school day. We found that by working closely with families we can further understand parents' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the roles they play in the literacy development of their children. In turn, parents are able to give voice, through their actions, to the commitment they feel for their children to succeed.

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The authors wish to acknowledge the support of the FINE Foundation of Iowa for their financial support for the second year of this program.

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